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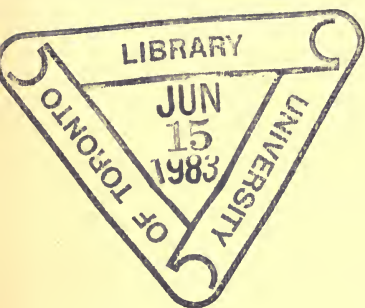
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AN OLD MAN'S LOVE.

CHAPTER XIII.

AT LITTLE ALRESFORD.

MR HALL was a pleasant English gentleman, now verging upon seventy years of age, who had “never had a headache in his life,” as he was wont to boast, but who lived very carefully, as one who did not intend to have many headaches. He certainly did not intend to make his headache by the cares of the work of the world. He was very well off;—that is to say, that with so many thousands a year, he managed to live upon half. This he had done for

very many years, because the estate was entailed on a distant relative, and because he had not chosen to leave his children paupers. When the girls came he immediately resolved that he would never go up to London,—and kept his resolve. Not above once in three or four years was it supposed to be necessary that he showed his head to a London hairdresser. He was quite content to have a practitioner out from Alresford, and to pay him one shilling, including the journey. His tenants in these bad times had always paid their rents, but they had done so because their rents had not been raised since the squire had come to the throne. Mr Hall knew well that if he was anxious to save himself from headaches in that line, he had better let his lands on easy terms. He was very hospitable, but he never gave turtle from London, or fish from Southampton, or strawberries or peas on the first of April. He could give a dinner without champagne, and thought forty shillings a dozen price enough for

port or sherry, or even claret. He kept a carriage for his four daughters, and did not tell all the world that the horses spent a fair proportion of their time at the plough. The four daughters had two saddle-horses between them, and the father had another for his own use. He did not hunt,—and living in that part of Hampshire, I think he was right. He did shoot after the manner of our forefathers;—would go out, for instance, with Mr Blake, and perhaps Mr Whittlestaff, and would bring home three pheasants, four partridges, a hare, and any quantity of rabbits that the cook might have ordered. He was a man determined on no account to live beyond his means; and was not very anxious to seem to be rich. He was a man of no strong affections, or peculiarly generous feelings. Those who knew him, and did not like him, said that he was selfish. They who were partial to him declared that he never owed a shilling that he could not pay, and that his daughters were very happy in having such

a father. He was a good-looking man, with well-formed features, but one whom you had to see often before you could remember him. And as I have said before, he "never had a headache in his life." "When your father wasn't doing quite so well with the bank as his friends wished, he asked me to do something for him. Well; I didn't see my way."

"I was a boy then, and I heard nothing of my father's business."

"I dare say not; but I cannot help telling you. He thought I was unkind. I thought that he would go on from one trouble to another;—and he did. He quarrelled with me, and for years we never spoke. Indeed I never saw him again. But for the sake of old friendship, I am very glad to meet you." This he said, as he was walking across the hall to the drawing-room.

There Gordon met the young ladies with the clergyman, and had to undergo the necessary

introductions. He thought that he could perceive at once that his story, as it regarded Mary Lawrie, had been told to all of them. Gordon was quick, and could learn from the manners of his companions what had been said about him, and could perceive that they were aware of something of his story. Blake had no such quickness, and could attribute none of it to another. "I am very proud to have the pleasure of making you acquainted with these five young ladies." As he said this he had just paused in his narrative of Mr Whittlestaff's love, and was certain that he had changed the conversation with great effect. But the young ladies were unable not to look as young ladies would have looked when hearing the story of an unfortunate gentleman's love. And Mr Blake would certainly have been unable to keep such a secret.

"This is Miss Hall, and this is Miss Augusta Hall," said the father. "People do think that they are alike."

"Oh, papa, what nonsense! You needn't tell Mr Gordon that."

"No doubt he would find it out without telling," continued the father.

"I can't see it, for the life of me," said Mr Blake. He evidently thought that civility demanded such an assertion. Mr Gordon, looking at the two young ladies, felt that he would never know them apart though he might live in the house for a year.

"Evelina is the third," continued Mr Hall, pointing out the one whom Mr Blake had specially recommended to his friend's notice. "Evelina is not quite so like, but she's like too."

"Papa, what nonsense you do talk!" said Evelina.

"And this is Mary. Mary considers herself to be quite the hope of the family; *spem gregis*. Ha, ha!"

"What does *spem gregis* mean? I'm sure I don't know," said Mary. The four young ladies

were about thirty, varying up from thirty to thirty-five. They were fair-haired, healthy young women, with good common-sense, not beautiful, though very like their father.

“And now I must introduce you to Miss Forrester,—Kattie Forrester,” said Mr Blake, who was beginning to think that his own young lady was being left out in the cold.

“Yes, indeed,” said Mr Hall. “As I had begun with my own, I was obliged to go on to the end. Miss Forrester—Mr Gordon. Miss Forrester is a young lady whose promotion has been fixed in the world.”

“Mr Hall, how can you do me so much injury as to say that? You take away from me the chance of changing my mind.”

“Yes,” said the oldest Miss Hall; “and Mr Gordon the possibility of changing his. Mr Gordon, what a sad thing it is that Mr Harbottle should never have had an opportunity of seeing his old parish once again.”

“I never knew him,” said Gordon.

"But he had been here nearly fifty years. And then to leave the parish without seeing it any more. It's very sad when you look at it in that light."

"He has never resided here permanently for a quarter of a century," said Mr Blake.

"Off and on in the summer time," said Augusta. "Of course he could not take much of the duty, because he had a clergyman's throat. I think it a great pity that he should have gone off so suddenly."

"Miss Forrester won't wish to have his *resurgam* sung, I warrant you," said Mr Hall.

"I don't know much about *resurgams*," said the young lady, "but I don't see why the parish shall not be just as well in Mr Blake's hands." Then the young bride was taken away by the four elder ladies to dress, and the gentlemen followed them half an hour afterwards.

They were all very kind to him, and sitting after dinner, Mr Hall suggested that Mr Whitstaff and Miss Lawrie should be asked over

to dine on the next day. John Gordon had already promised to stay until the third, and had made known his intention of going back to South Africa as soon as he could arrange matters. "I've got nothing to keep me here," he said, "and as there is a good deal of money at stake, I should be glad to be there as soon as possible."

"Oh, come! I don't know about your having nothing to keep you here," said Blake. But as to Mr Hall's proposition regarding the inhabitants of Croker's Lodge, Gordon said nothing. He could not object to the guests whom a gentleman might ask to his own house; but he thought it improbable that either Mr Whittlestaff or Mary should come. If he chose to appear and to bring her with him, it must be his own look-out. At any rate he, Gordon, could say and could do nothing on such an occasion. He had been betrayed into telling his secret to this garrulous young parson. There was no help for spilt milk; but it was not probable

that Mr Blake would go any further, and he at any rate must be content to bear the man's society for one other evening. "I don't see why you shouldn't manage to make things pleasant even yet," said the parson. But to this John Gordon made no reply.

In the evening some of the sisters played a few pieces at the piano, and Miss Forrester sang a few songs. Mr Hall in the meantime went fast asleep. John Gordon couldn't but tell himself that his evenings at Kimberley were, as a rule, quite as exciting. But then Kattie Forrester did not belong to him, and he had not found himself able as yet to make a choice between the young ladies. It was, however, interesting to see the manner in which the new vicar hung about the lady of his love, and the evident but innocent pride with which she accepted the attentions of her admirer.

"Don't you think she's a beautiful girl?" said Blake, coming to Gordon's room after they had all retired to bed; "such genuine wit, and

so bright, and her singing, you know, is quite perfect,—absolutely just what it ought to be. I do know something about singing myself, because I've had all the parish voices under my own charge for the last three years. A practice like that goes a long way, you know." To this Mr Gordon could only give that assent which silence is intended to imply. "She'll have £5000 at once, you know, which does make her in a manner equal to either of the Miss Halls. I don't quite know what they'll have, but not more than that, I should think. The property is entailed, and he's a saving man. But if he can have put by £20,000, he has done very well ; don't you think so ?"

"Very well indeed."

"I suppose I might have had one of them ; I don't mind telling you in strictest confidence. But, goodness gracious, after I had once seen Kattie Forrester, there was no longer a doubt. I wish you'd tell me what you think about her."

“About Miss Forrester?”

“You needn’t mind speaking quite openly to me. I’m that sort of fellow that I shouldn’t mind what any fellow said. I’ve formed my own ideas, and am not likely to change them. But I should like to hear, you know, how she strikes a fellow who has been at the diamond-fields. I cannot imagine but that you must have a different idea about women to what we have.” Then Mr Blake sat himself down in an arm-chair at the foot of the bed, and prepared himself to discuss the opinion which he did not doubt that his friend was about to deliver.

“A very nice young woman indeed,” said John Gordon, who was anxious to go to bed.

“Ah, you know,—that’s a kind of thing that anybody can say. There is no real friendship in that. I want to know the true candid opinion of a man who has travelled about the world, and has been at the diamond-fields. It

isn't everybody who has been at the diamond-fields," continued he, thinking that he might thereby flatter his friend.

"No, not everybody. I suppose a young woman is the same there as here, if she have the same natural gifts. Miss Forrester would be pretty anywhere."

"That's a matter of course. Any fellow can see that with half an eye. Absolutely beautiful, I should say, rather than pretty."

"Just so. It's only a variation in terms, you know."

"But then her manner, her music, her language, her wit, and the colour of her hair! When I remember it all, I think I'm the luckiest fellow in the world. I shall be a deal happier with her than with Augusta Hall. Don't you think so? Augusta was the one intended for me; but, bless you, I couldn't look at her after I had seen Kattie Forrester. I don't think you've given me your true unbiassed opinion yet."

"Indeed I have," said John Gordon.

"Well; I should be more free-spoken than that, if you were to ask me about Mary Lawrie. But then, of course, Mary Lawrie is not your engaged one. It does make a difference. If it does turn out that she marries Mr Whittlestaff, I shan't think much of her, I can tell you that. As it is, as far as looks are concerned, you can't compare her to my Kattie."

"Comparisons are odious," said Gordon.

"Well, yes; when you are sure to get the worst of them. You wouldn't think comparisons odious if you were going to marry Kattie, and it was my lot to have Mary Lawrie. Well, yes; I don't mind going to bed now, as you have owned so much as that."

"Of all the fools," said Gordon to himself, as he went to his own chamber,—“of all the fools who were ever turned out in the world to earn their own bread, he is the most utterly foolish. Yet he will earn his bread, and will come to no especial grief in the work. If he were to go

out to Kimberley, no one would pay him a guinea a-week. But he will perform the high work of a clergyman of the Church of England indifferently well."

On the next morning a messenger was sent over to Croker's Hall, and came back after due lapse of time with an answer to the effect that Mr Whittlestaff and Miss Lawrie would have pleasure in dining that day at Little Alresford Park. "That's right," said Mr Blake to the lady of his love. "We shall now, perhaps, be able to put the thing into a proper groove. I'm always very lucky in managing such matters. Not that I think that Gordon cares very much about the young lady, judging from what he says of her."

"Then I don't see, why you should interest yourself."

"For the young lady's sake. A lady always prefers a young gentleman to an old one. Only think what you'd feel if you were married to Mr Whittlestaff."

“ Oh, Montagu! how can you talk such nonsense? ”

“ I don't suppose you ever would, because you are not one of those sort of young ladies. I don't suppose that Mary Lawrie likes it herself; and therefore I'd break the match off in a moment if I could. That's what I call good-natured.”

After lunch they all went off to the Rookery, which was at the other side of the park from Gar Wood. It was a beautiful spot, lying at the end of the valley, through which they had to get out from their carriage, and to walk for half a mile. Only for the sake of doing honour to Miss Forrester, they would have gone on foot. But as it was, they had all the six horses among them. Mr Gordon was put up on one of the young ladies' steeds, the squire and the parson each had his own, and Miss Evelina was also mounted, as Mr Blake had suggested, perhaps with the view to the capture of Mr Gordon. “ As it's your first day,” whispered Mr Blake to

Kattie, "it is so nice, I think, that the carriage and horses should all come out. Of course there is nothing in the distance, but there should be a respect shown on such an occasion. Mr Hall does do everything of this kind just as it should be."

"I suppose you know the young lady who is coming here to-night," said Evelina to Mr Gordon.

"Oh, yes; I knew her before I went abroad."

"But not Mr Whittlestaff?"

"I had never met Mr Whittlestaff, though I had heard much of his goodness."

"And now they are to be married. Does it not seem to you to be very hard?"

"Not in the least. The young lady seems to have been left by her father and step-mother without any engagement, and, indeed, without any provision. She was brought here, in the first place, from sheer charity, and I can certainly understand that when she was here Mr Whittlestaff should have admired her."



“That’s a matter of course,” said Evelina.

“Mr Whittlestaff is not at all too old to fall in love with any young lady. This is a pretty place,—a very lovely spot. I think I like it almost better than Gar Wood.” Then there was no more said about Mary Lawrie till they all rode back to dinner.

CHAPTER XIV.

MR WHITTLESTAFF IS GOING OUT TO DINNER.

"THERE'S an invitation come, asking us to dine at Little Alresford to-day." This was said, soon after breakfast, by Mr Whittlestaff to Mary Lawrie, on the day after Mr Gordon's coming. "I think we'll go."

"Could you not leave me behind?"

"By no means. I want you to become intimate with the girls, who are good girls."

"But Mr Gordon is there."

"Exactly. That is just what I want. It will be better that you and he should meet each other, without the necessity of making a scene." From this it may be understood that Mr Whittlestaff had explained to Mary as

much as he had thought necessary of what had occurred between him and John Gordon, and that Mary's answers had been satisfactory to his feelings. Mary had told him that she was contented with her lot in life, as Mr Whittlestaff had proposed it for her. She had not been enthusiastic; but then he had not expected it. She had not assured him that she would forget John Gordon. He had not asked her. She had simply said that if he were satisfied,—so was she. “I think that with me, dearest, at any rate, you will be safe.” “I am quite sure that I shall be safe,” she had answered. And that had been sufficient.

But the reader will also understand from this that he had sought for no answer to those burning questions which John Gordon had put to him. Had she loved John Gordon the longest? Did she love him the best? There was no doubt a certain cautious selfishness in the way in which he had gone to work. And yet of general selfishness it was impossible to accuse

him. He was willing to give her everything,—to do all for her. And he had first asked her to be his wife, with every observance. And then he could always protect himself on the plea that he was doing the best he could for her. His property was assured,—in the three per cents, as Mrs Baggett had suggested; whereas John Gordon's was all in diamonds. How frequently do diamonds melt and come to nothing? They are things which a man can carry in his pocket, and lose or give away. They cannot,—so thought Mr Whittlestaff,—be settled in the hands of trustees, or left to the charge of an executor. They cannot be substantiated. Who can say that, when looking to a lady's interest, this bit of glass may not come up instead of that precious stone? "John Gordon might be a very steady fellow; but we have only his own word for that,"—as Mr Whittlestaff observed to himself. There could not be a doubt but that Mr Whittlestaff himself was the safer staff of the two on which a

young lady might lean. He did make all these excuses for himself, and determined that they were of such a nature that he might rely upon them with safety. But still there was a pang in his bosom—a silent secret—which kept on whispering to him that he was not the best beloved. He had, however, resolved steadfastly that he would not put that question to Mary. If she did not wish to declare her love, neither did he. It was a pity, a thousand pities, that it should be so. A change in her heart might, however, take place. It would come to pass that she would learn that he was the superior staff on which to lean. John Gordon might disappear among the diamond-fields, and no more be heard of. He, at any rate, would do his best for her, so that she should not repent her bargain. But he was determined that the bargain, as it had been struck, should be carried out. Therefore, in communicating to Mary the invitation which he had received from Little Alresford, he did not find it necessary to make

any special speech in answer to her inquiry about John Gordon.

She understood it all, and could not in her very heart pronounce a judgment against him. She knew that he was doing that which he believed would be the best for her welfare. She, overwhelmed by the debt of her gratitude, had acceded to his request, and had been unable afterwards to depart from her word. She had said that it should be so, and she could not then turn upon him and declare that when she had given him her hand, she had been unaware of the presence of her other lover. There was an injustice, an unkindness, an ingratitude, a selfishness in this, which forbade her to think of it as being done by herself. It was better for her that she should suffer, though the suffering should be through her whole life, than that he should be disappointed. No doubt the man would suffer too,—her hero, her lover,—he with whom she would so willingly have risked everything, either with or without the diamonds. She

could not, however, bear to think that Mr Whittlestaff should be so very prudent and so very wise solely on her behalf. She would go to him, but for other reasons than that. As she walked about the place half the day, up and down the long walk, she told herself that it was useless to contend with her love. She did love John Gordon ; she knew that she loved him with her whole heart ; she knew that she must be true to him ;—but still she would marry Mr Whittlestaff, and do her duty in that state of life to which it had pleased God to call her. There would be a sacrifice—a sacrifice of two—but still it was justice.

Had she not consented to take everything from Mr Whittlestaff ; her bread, her meat, her raiment, the shelter under which she lived, and the position in the world which she now enjoyed ? Had the man come but a day earlier, it would all have been well. She would have told her love before Mr Whittlestaff had spoken of his wants. Circumstances had been arranged dif-

ferently, and she must bear it. But she knew that it would be better for her that she should see John Gordon no more. Had he started at once to London and gone thence to the diamond-fields without seeing her again there would be a feeling that she had become the creature of stern necessity; there would have been no hope for her,—as also no fear. Had he started a second time for South Africa, she would have looked upon his further return with any reference to her own wants as a thing impossible. But now how would it be with her? Mr Whittlestaff had told her with a stern indifference that she must again meet this man, sit at the table with him as an old friend, and be again subject to his influence. “It will be better that you and he should meet,” he had said, “without the necessity of making a scene.” How could she assure him that there would be no scene?

Then she thought that she would have recourse to that ordinary feminine excuse, a head-

ache; but were she to do so she would own the whole truth to her master; she would have declared that she so loved the man that she could not endure to be in his presence. She must now let the matter pass as he had intended. She must go to Mr Hall's house, and there encounter him she loved with what show of coldness she might be able to assume.

But the worst of it all lay in this,—that she could not but think that he had been induced to remain in the neighbourhood in order that he might again try to gain his point. She had told herself again and again that it was impossible, that she must decide as she had decided, and that Mr Whittlestaff had decided so also. He had used what eloquence was within his reach, and it had been all in vain. He could now appeal only to herself, and to such appeal there could be but one answer. And how was such appeal to be made in Mr Hall's drawing-room? Surely

John Gordon had been foolish in remaining in the neighbourhood. Nothing but trouble could come of it.

"So you are going to see this young man again!" This came from Mrs Baggett, who had been in great perturbation all the morning. The Sergeant had slept in the stables through the night, and had had his breakfast brought to him, warm, by his own wife; but he had sat up among the straw, and had winked at her, and had asked her to give him threepence of gin with the cat-lap. To this she had acceded, thinking probably that she could not altogether deprive him of the food to which he was accustomed without injury. Then, under the influence of the gin and the promise of a ticket to Portsmouth, which she undertook to get for him at the station, he was induced to go down with her, and was absolutely despatched. Her own box was still locked up, and she had slept with one of the two maids. All this had not happened without great disturbance in the



household. She herself was very angry with her master because of the box; she was very angry with Mary, because Mary was, she thought, averse to her old lover; she was very angry with Mr Gordon, because she well understood that Mr Gordon was anxious to disturb the arrangement which had been made for the family. She was very angry with her husband, not because he was generally a drunken old reprobate, but because he had especially disgraced her on the present occasion by the noise which he had made in the road. No doubt she had been treated unfairly in the matter of the box, and could have succeeded in getting the law of her master. But she could not turn against her master in that way. She could give him a bit of her own mind, and that she did very freely; but she could not bring herself to break the lock of his door. And then, as things went now, she did think it well that she should remain a few days longer at Croker's Hall. The occasion of her master's

marriage was to be the cause of her going away. She could not endure not to be foremost among all the women at Croker's Hall. But it was intolerable to her feelings that any one should interfere with her master; and she thought that, if need were, she could assist him by her tongue. Therefore she was disposed to remain yet a few days in her old place, and had come, after she had got the ticket for her husband,—which had been done before Mr Whittlestaff's breakfast,—to inform her master of her determination. "Don't be a fool," Mr Whittlestaff had said.

"I'm always a fool, whether I go or stay, so that don't much matter." This had been her answer, and then she had gone in to scold the maids.

As soon as she had heard of the intended dinner-party, she attacked Mary Lawrie. "So you're going to see this young man again?"

"Mr Whittlestaff is going to dine at Little Alresford, and intends to take me with him."

“Oh yes; that’s all very well. He’d have left you behind if he’d been of my way of thinking. Mr Gordon here, and Mr Gordon there! I wonder what’s Mr Gordon! He ain’t no better than an ordinary miner. Coals and diamonds is all one to me;—I’d rather have the coals for choice.” But Mary was not in a humour to contest the matter with Mrs Baggett, and left the old woman the mistress of the field.

When the time arrived for going to the dinner, Mr Whittlestaff took Mary in the pony carriage with him. “There is always a groom about there,” he said, “so we need not take the boy.” His object was, as Mary in part understood, that he should be able to speak what last words he might have to utter without having other ears than hers to listen to them.

Mary would have been surprised had she known how much painful thought Mr Whittlestaff gave to the matter. To her it seemed as

though he had made up his mind without any effort, and was determined to abide by it. He had thought it well to marry her; and having asked her, and having obtained her consent, he intended to take advantage of her promise. That was her idea of Mr Whittlestaff, as to which she did not at all blame him. But he was, in truth, changing his purpose every quarter of an hour;—or not changing it, but thinking again and again throughout the entire day whether he would not abandon himself and all his happiness to the romantic idea of making this girl supremely happy. Were he to do so, he must give up everything. The world would have nothing left for him as to which he could feel the slightest interest. There came upon him at such moments insane ideas as to the amount of sacrifice which would be demanded of him. She should have everything—his house, his fortune; and he, John Gordon, as being a part of her, should have them also. He, Whittlestaff, would abolish himself as far

as such abolition might be possible. The idea of suicide was abominable to him—was wicked, cowardly, and inhuman. But if this were to take place he could wish to cease to live. Then he would comfort himself by assuring himself again and again that of the two he would certainly make the better husband. He was older. Yes; it was a pity that he should be so much the elder. And he knew that he was old of his age,—such a one as a girl like Mary Lawrie could hardly be brought to love passionately. He brought up against himself all the hard facts as sternly as could any younger rival. He looked at himself in the glass over and over again, and always gave the verdict against his own appearance. There was nothing to recommend him. So he told himself,—judging of himself most unfairly. He set against himself as evils little points by which Mary's mind and Mary's judgment would never be affected. But in truth throughout it all he thought only of her welfare. But there came

upon him constantly an idea that he hardly knew how to be as good to her as he would have been had it not been for Catherine Bailey. To have attempted twice, and twice to have failed so disastrously ! He was a man to whom to have failed once in such a matter was almost death. How should he bear it twice and still live ? Nevertheless he did endeavour to think only of her welfare. " You won't find it cold, my dear ? " he said.

" Cold ! Why, Mr Whittlestaff, it's quite hot."

" I meant hot. I did mean to say hot."

" I've got my parasol."

" Oh !—ah !—yes ; so I perceive. Go on, Tommy. That foolish old woman will settle down at last, I think." To this Mary could make no answer, because, according to her ideas, Mrs Baggett's settling down must depend on her master's marriage. " I think it very civil of Mr Hall asking us in this way."

"I suppose it is."

"Because you may be sure he had heard of your former acquaintance with him."

"Do you think so?"

"Not a doubt about it. He said as much to me in his note. That young clergyman of his will have told him everything. 'Percontatorem fugito nam garrulus idem est.' I've taught you Latin enough to understand that. But, Mary, if you wish to change your mind, this will be your last opportunity." His heart at that moment had been very tender towards her, and she had resolved that hers should be very firm to him.

CHAPTER XV.

MR WHITTLESTAFF GOES OUT TO DINNER.

THIS would be her last opportunity. So Mary told herself as she got out of the carriage at Mr Hall's front door. It was made manifest to her by such a speech that he did not expect that she should do so, but looked upon her doing so as within the verge of possibility. She could still do it, and yet not encounter his disgust or his horror. How terrible was the importance to herself, and, as she believed, to the other man also. Was she not justified in so thinking? Mr Gordon had come home, travelling a great distance, at much risk to his property, at great loss of time, through infinite trouble and danger, merely to ask her to be his wife.

Had a letter reached her from him but a week ago bidding her to come, would she not have gone through all the danger and all the trouble ? How willingly would she have gone ! It was the one thing that she desired ; and, as far as she could understand the signs which he had given, it was the one, one thing which he desired. He had made his appeal to that other man, and, as far as she could understand the signs which had reached her, had been referred with confidence to her decision. Now she was told that the chance of changing her mind was still in her power.

The matter was one of terrible importance ; but was its importance to Mr Whittlestaff as great as to John Gordon ? She put herself altogether out of the question. She acknowledged to herself, with a false humility, that she was nobody ;—she was a poor woman living on charity, and was not to be thought of when the position of these two men was taken into consideration. It chanced that they both wanted

her. Which wanted the most? Which of the two would want her for the longest? To which would her services be of the greater avail in assisting him to his happiness. Could there be a doubt? Was it not in human nature that she should bind herself to the younger man, and with him go through the world, whether safely or in danger?

But though she had had time to allow these questions to pass through her mind between the utterance of Mr Whittlestaff's words and her entrance into Mr Hall's drawing-room, she did not in truth doubt. She knew that she had made up her mind on the matter. Mr Gordon would in all probability have no opportunity of saying another word to her. But let him say what word he might, it should be in vain. Nothing that he could say, nothing that she could say, would avail anything. If this other man would release her,—then indeed she would be released. But there was no chance of such release coming. In truth, Mary did



not know how near the chance was to her ;—or rather, how near the chance had been. He had now positively made up his mind, and would say not a word further unless she asked him. If Mary said nothing to John Gordon on this evening, he would take an opportunity before they left the house to inform Mr Hall of his intended marriage. When once the word should have passed his mouth, he could not live under the stigma of a second Catherine Bailey.

“Miss Lawrie, pray let me make you known to my intended.” This came from Mr Montagu Blake, who felt himself to be justified by his peculiar circumstances in so far taking upon himself the work of introducing the guests in Mr Hall’s house. “Of course, you’ve heard all about it. I am the happiest young man in Hampshire,—and she is the next.”

“Speak for yourself, Montagu. I am not a young man at all.”

“You’re a young man’s darling, which is the next thing to it.”

"How are you, Whittlestaff?" said Mr Hall.
"Wonderful weather, isn't it? I'm told that you've been in trouble about that drunken husband which plagues the life out of that respectable housekeeper of yours."

"He is a trouble; but if he is bad to me, how much worse must he be to her?"

"That's true. He must be very bad, I should think. Miss Mary, why don't you come over this fine weather, and have tea with my girls and Kattie Forrester in the woods? You should take your chance while you have a young man willing to wait upon you."

"I shall be quite delighted," said Blake, "and so will John Gordon."

"Only that I shall be in London this time to-morrow," said Gordon.

"That's nonsense. You are not going to Kimberley all at once. The young ladies expect you to bring out a lot of diamonds and show them before you start. Have you seen diamonds, Miss Lawrie?"

"Indeed no," said Mary.

"I think I should have asked just to see them," said Evelina Hall. Why should they join her name with his in this uncivil manner, or suppose that she had any special power to induce him to show his treasures.

"When you first find a diamond," said Mr Hall, "what do you do with it? Do you ring a bell and call together your friends, and begin to rejoice."

"No, indeed. The diamond is generally washed out of the mud by some nigger, and we have to look very sharp after him to see that he doesn't hide it under his toe-nails. It's not a very romantic kind of business from first to last."

"Only profitable," said the curate.

"That's as may be. It is subject to greater losses than the preaching of sermons."

"I should like to go out and see it all," said Miss Hall, looking into Miss Lawrie's face. This also appeared to Mary to be ill-natured.

Then the butler announced the dinner, and they all followed Mr Hall and the curate's bride out of one room into the other. "This young lady," said he, "is supposed to be in the ascendant just at the present moment. She can't be married above two or three times at the most. I say this to excuse myself to Miss Lawrie, who ought perhaps to have the post of honour." To this some joking reply was made, and they all sat down to their dinner. Miss Lawrie was at Mr Hall's left hand, and at her left hand John Gordon was seated. Mary could perceive that everything was arranged so as to throw herself and John Gordon together,—as though they had some special interest in each other. Of all this Mr Whittlestaff saw nothing. But John Gordon did perceive something, and told himself that that ass Blake had been at work. But his perceptions in the matter were not half as sharp as those of Mary Lawrie.

"I used to be very fond of your father, Gor-

don," said Mr Hall, when the dinner was half over. "It's all done and gone now. Dear, dear, dear!"

"He was an unfortunate man, and perhaps expected too much from his friends."

"I am very glad to see his son here, at any rate. I wish you were not going to settle down so far away from us."

"Kimberley is a long way off."

"Yes, indeed; and when a fellow gets out there he is apt to stay, I suppose."

"I shall do so, probably. I have nobody near enough to me here at home to make it likely that I shall come back."

"You have uncles and aunts?" said Mr Hall.

"One uncle and two aunts. I shall suit their views and my cousins' better by sending home some diamonds than by coming myself."

"How long will that take?" asked Mr Hall. The conversation was kept up solely between Mr Hall and John Gordon. Mr Whittlestaff took no share in it unless when he was asked

a question, and the four girls kept up a whisper with Miss Forrester and Montagu Blake.

"I have a share in rather a good thing," said Gordon; "and if I could get out of it so as to realise my property, I think that six months might suffice."

"Oh, dear! Then we may have you back again before the year's out?" Mr Whittlestaff looked up at this, as though apprised that the danger was not yet over. But he reflected that before twelve months were gone he would certainly have made Mary Lawrie his wife.

"Kimberley is not a very alluring place," said John Gordon. "I don't know any spot on God's earth that I should be less likely to choose my abiding resting-place."

"Except for the diamonds."

"Except for the diamonds, as you remark. And therefore when a man has got his fill of diamonds, he is likely to leave."

"His fill of diamonds!" said Augusta Hall.

"Shouldn't you like to try your fill of diamonds?" asked Blake.

"Not at all," said Evelina. "I'd rather have strawberries and cream."

"I think I should like diamonds best," said Mary. Whereupon Evelina suggested that her younger sister was a greedy little creature.

"As soon as you've got your fill of diamonds, which won't take more than six months longer," suggested Mr Hall, "you'll come back again?"

"Not exactly. I have an idea of going up the country across the Zambesi. I've a notion that I should like to make my way out somewhere in the Mediterranean,—Egypt, for instance, or Algiers."

"What!—across the equator? You'd never do that alive?"

"Things of that kind have been done. Stanley crossed the continent."

"But not from south to north. I don't believe in that. You had better remain at Kimberley and get more diamonds."

“He’d be with diamonds like the boy with the bacon,” said the clergyman; “when prepared for another wish, he’d have more than he could eat.”

“To tell the truth,” said John Gordon, “I don’t quite know what I should do. It would depend perhaps on what somebody else would join me in doing. My life was very lonely at Kimberley, and I do not love being alone.”

“Then, why don’t you take a wife?” said Montagu Blake, very loudly, as though he had hit the target right in the bull’s-eye. He so spoke as to bring the conversation to an abrupt end. Mr Whittlestaff immediately looked conscious. He was a man who, on such an occasion, could not look otherwise than conscious. And the five girls, with all of whom the question of the loves of John Gordon and Mary Lawrie had been fully discussed, looked conscious. Mary Lawrie was painfully conscious; but endeavoured to hide it, not unsuccessfully. But in her endeavour she had to

look unnaturally stern,—and was conscious, too, that she did that. Mr Hall, whose feelings of romance were not perhaps of the highest order, looked round on Mr Whittlestaff and Mary Lawrie. Montagu Blake felt that he had achieved a triumph. “Yes,” said he, “if those are your feelings, why don’t you take a wife?”

“One man may not be so happy as another,” said Gordon, laughing. “You have suited yourself admirably, and seem to think it quite easy for a man to make a selection.”

“Not quite such a selection as mine, perhaps,” said Blake.

“Then think of the difficulty. Do you suppose that any second Miss Forrester would dream of going to the diamond-fields with me?”

“Perhaps not,” said Blake. “Not a second Miss Forrester—but somebody else.”

“Something inferior?”

“Well—yes; inferior to my Miss Forrester, certainly.”

"You are the most conceited young man that I ever came across," said the young lady herself.

"And I am not inclined to put up with anything that is very inferior," said John Gordon. He could not help his eye from glancing for a moment round upon Mary Lawrie. She was aware of it, though no one else noticed it in the room. She was aware of it, though any one watching her would have said that she had never looked at him.

"A man may always find a woman to suit him, if he looks well about him," said Mr Hall, sententiously. "Don't you think so, Whittlestaff?"

"I dare say he may," said Mr Whittlestaff, very flatly. And as he said so he made up his mind that he would, for that day, postpone the task of telling Mr Hall of his intended marriage.

The evening passed by, and the time came for Mr Whittlestaff to drive Miss Lawrie back



to Croker's Hall. She had certainly spent a most uneventful period, as far as action or even words of her own was concerned. But the afternoon was one which she would never forget. She had been quite, quite sure, when she came into the house; but she was more than sure now. At every word that had been spoken she had thought of herself and of him. Would he not have known how to have chosen a fit companion,—only for this great misfortune? And would she have been so much inferior to Miss Forrester? Would he have thought her inferior to any one? Would he not have preferred her to any other female whom the world had at the present moment produced? Oh, the pity of it; the pity of it!

Then came the bidding of adieu. Gordon was to sleep at Little Alresford that night, and to take his departure by early train on the next morning. Of the adieux spoken the next morning we need take no notice, but only of the word or two uttered that night.

"Good-bye, Mr Gordon," said Mr Whittlestaff, having taken courage for the occasion, and having thought even of the necessary syllables to be spoken.

"Good-bye, Mr Whittlestaff," and he gave his rival his hand in apparently friendly grasp. To those burning questions he had asked he had received no word of reply; but they were questions which he would not repeat again.

"Good-bye, Mr Gordon," said Mary. She had thought of the moment much, but had determined at last that she would trust herself to nothing further. He took her hand, but did not say a word. He took it and pressed it for a moment, and then turned his face away, and went in from the hall back to the door leading to the drawing-room. Mr Whittlestaff was at the moment putting on his great-coat, and Mary stood with her bonnet and cloak on at the open front door, listening to a word or two from Kattie Forrester and Evelina Hall.

"Oh, I wish, I wish it might have been!" said Kattie Forrester.

"And so do I," said Evelina. "Can't it be?"

"Good-night," said Mary, boldly, stepping out rapidly into the moonlight, and mounting without assistance to her place in the open carriage.

"I beg your pardon," said Mr Hall, following her; but there came not a word from her.

Mr Whittlestaff had gone back after John Gordon. "By-the-by," he said, "what will be your address in London?"

"The 'Oxford and Cambridge' in Pall Mall," said he.

"Oh, yes; the club there. It might be that I should have a word to send to you. But I don't suppose I shall," he added, as he turned round to go away. Then he shook hands with the party in the hall, and mounting up into the carriage, drove Mary and himself away homewards towards Croker's Hall.

Not a word was spoken between them for the first mile, nor did a sound of a sob or an audi-

ble suspicion of a tear come from Mary. Why did those girls know the secret of her heart in that way? Why had they dared to express a hope as to an event, or an idea as to a disappointment, all knowledge of which ought to be buried in her own bosom? Had she spoken of her love for John Gordon? She was sure that no word had escaped her. And were it surmised, was it not customary that such surmises should be kept in the dark? But here these young ladies had dared to pity her for her vain love, as though, like some village maiden, she had gone about in tears bewailing herself that some groom or gardener had been faithless. But sitting thus for the first mile, she choked herself to keep down her sobs.

"Mary," at last he whispered to her.

"Well, Mr Whittlestaff?"

"Mary, we are both of us unhappy."

"I am not unhappy," she said, plucking up herself suddenly. "Why do you say that I am unhappy?"

"You seem so. I at any rate am unhappy."

"What makes you so?"

"I did wrong to take you to dine in company with that man."

"It was not for me to refuse to go."

"No; there is no blame to you in it;—nor is there blame to me. But it would have been better for us both had we remained away." Then he drove on in silence, and did not speak another word till they reached home.

"Well!" said Mrs Baggett, following them into the dining-room.

"What do you mean by 'well.'"

"What did the folks say to you at Mr Hall's? I can see by your face that some of them have been saying summat."

"Nobody has been saying anything that I know of," said Mr Whittlestaff. "Do you go to bed." Then when Mrs Baggett was gone, and Mary had listlessly seated herself on a chair, her lover again addressed her. "I wish I knew what there is in your heart." Yet she

would not tell him ; but turned away her face and sat silent. "Have you nothing to say to me?"

"What should I have to say to you? I have nothing to say of that of which you are thinking."

"He has gone now, Mary."

"Yes; he has gone."

"And you are contented?" It did seem hard upon her that she should be called upon to tell a lie,—to say that which he must know to be a lie,—and to do so in order that he might be encouraged to persevere in achieving his own object. But she did not quite understand him. "Are you contented?" he repeated again.

Then she thought that she would tell the lie. If it was well that she should make the sacrifice for his sake, why should it not be completed? If she had to give herself to him, why should not the gift be as satisfactory as it might be made to his feelings? "Yes; I am contented."

"And you do not wish to see him again?"

"Certainly not, as your wife."

"You do not wish it at all," he rejoined,
"whether you be my wife or otherwise?"

"I think you press me too hard." Then she remembered herself, and the perfect sacrifice which she was minded to make. "No; I do not wish again to see Mr Gordon at all. Now, if you will allow me, I will go to bed. I am thoroughly tired out, and I hardly know what I am saying."

"Yes; you can go to bed," he said. Then she gave him her hand in silence, and went off to her own room.

She had no sooner reached her bed, than she threw herself on it and burst into tears. All this which she had to endure,—all that she would have to bear,—would be, she thought, too much for her. And there came upon her a feeling of contempt for his cruelty. Had he sternly resolved to keep her to her promised word, and to forbid her all happiness for the

future,—to make her his wife, let her heart be as it might;—had he said: “you have come to my house, and have eaten my bread and have drunk of my cup, and have then promised to become my wife, and now you shall not depart from it because this interloper has come between us;”—then, though she might have felt him to be cruel, still she would have respected him. He would have done, as she believed, as other men do. But he wished to gain his object, and yet not appear to be cruel. It was so that she thought of him. “And it shall be as he would have it,” she said to herself. But though she saw far into his character, she did not quite read it aright.

He remained there alone in his library into the late hours of the night. But he did not even take up a book with the idea of solacing his hours. He too had his idea of self-sacrifice, which went quite as far as hers. But yet he was not as sure as was she that the self-sacrifice would be a duty. He did not believe, as

did she, in the character of John Gordon. What if he should give her up to one who did not deserve her,—to one whose future would not be stable enough to secure the happiness and welfare of such a woman as was Mary Lawrie! He had no knowledge to guide him, nor had she;—nor, for the matter of that, had John Gordon himself any knowledge of what his own future might be. Of his own future Mr Whittlestaff could speak and think with the greatest confidence. It would be safe, happy, and bright, should Mary Lawrie become his wife. Should she not do so, it must be altogether ruined and confounded.

He could not conceive it to be possible that he should be required by duty to make such a sacrifice; but he knew of himself that if her happiness, her true and permanent happiness, would require it, then the sacrifice should be made.

CHAPTER XVI.

MRS BAGGETT'S PHILOSOPHY.

THE next day was Saturday, and Mr Whittlestaff came out of his room early, intending to speak to Mrs Baggett. He had declared to himself that it was his purpose to give her some sound advice respecting her own affairs,—as far as her affairs and his were connected together. But low down in his mind, below the stratum in which his declared resolution was apparent to himself, there was a hope that he might get from her some comfort and strength as to his present purpose. Not but that he would ultimately do as he himself had determined; but, to tell the truth, he had not quite determined, and thought

that a word from Mrs Baggett might assist him.

As he came out from his room, he encountered Mary, intent upon her household duties. It was something before her usual time, and he was surprised. She had looked ill overnight and worn, and he had expected that she would keep her bed. "What makes you so early, Mary?" He spoke to her with his softest and most affectionate tone.

"I couldn't sleep, and I thought I might as well be up." She had followed him into the library, and when there he put his arm round her waist and kissed her forehead. It was a strange thing for him to do. She felt that it was so—very, very strange; but it never occurred to her that it behoved her to be angry at his caress. He had kissed her once before, and only once, and it had seemed to her that he had intended that their love-making should go on without kisses. But was she not his property, to do as he pleased with

her? And there could be no ground for displeasure on her part.

“Dear Mary,” he said, “if you could only know how constant my thoughts are to you.” She did not doubt that it was so; but just so constant were her thoughts to John Gordon. But from her to him there could be no show of affection—nothing but the absolute coldness of perfect silence. She had passed the whole evening with him last night, and had not been allowed to speak a single word to him beyond the ordinary greetings of society. She had felt that she had not been allowed to speak a single word to any one, because he had been present. Mr Whittlestaff had thrown over her the deadly mantle of his ownership, and she had consequently felt herself to be debarred from all right over her own words and actions. She had become his slave; she felt herself in very truth to be a poor creature whose only duty it was in the world to obey his volition. She had told herself during

the night that, with all her motives for loving him, she was learning to regard him with absolute hatred. And she hated herself because it was so. Oh, what a tedious affair was this of living! How tedious, how sad and miserable, must her future days be, as long as days should be left to her! Could it be made possible to her that she should ever be able to do her duty by this husband of hers,—for her, in whose heart of hearts would be seated continually the image of this other man?

“By-the-by,” said he, “I want to see Mrs Baggett. I suppose she is about somewhere.”

“Oh dear, yes. Since the trouble of her husband has become nearer, she is earlier and earlier every day. Shall I send her?” Then she departed, and in a few minutes Mrs Baggett entered the room.

“Come in, Mrs Baggett.”

“Yes, sir.”

“I have just a few words which I want to

say to you. Your husband has gone back to Portsmouth?"

"Yes sir; he have." This she said in a very decided tone, as though her master need trouble himself no further about her husband.

"I am very glad that it should be so. It's the best place for him,—unless he could be sent to Australia."

"He ain't a-done nothing to fit himself for Botany Bay, Mr Whittlestaff," said the old woman, bobbing her head at him.

"I don't care what place he has fitted himself for, so long as he doesn't come here. He is a disreputable old man."

"You needn't be so hard upon him, Mr Whittlestaff. He ain't a-done nothing much to you, barring sleeping in the stable one night when he had had a drop o' drink too much." And the old woman pulled out a great handkerchief, and began to wipe her eyes piteously.

"What a fool you are, Mrs Baggett."

"Yes; I am a fool. I knows that."

"Here's this disreputable old man eating and drinking your hard-earned wages."

"But they are my wages. And who's a right to them, only he?"

"I don't say anything about that, only he comes here and disturbs you."

"Well, yes; he is disturbing; if it's only because of his wooden-leg and red nose. I don't mean to say as he's the sort of a man as does a credit to a gentleman's house to see about the place. But he was my lot in matrimony, and I've got to put up with him. I ain't a-going to refuse to bear the burden which came to be my lot. I don't suppose he's earned a single shilling since he left the regiment, and that is hard upon a poor woman who's got nothing but her wages."

"Now, look here, Mrs Baggett."

"Yes, sir."

"Send him your wages."

"And have to go in rags myself,—in your service."

"You won't go in rags. Don't be a fool."

"I am a fool, Mr Whittlestaff; you can't tell me that too often."

"You won't go in rags. You ought to know us well enough——"

"Who is us, Mr Whittlestaff? They ain't no us;—just yet."

"Well;—me."

"Yes, I know you, Mr Whittlestaff."

"Send him your wages. You may be quite sure that you'll find yourself provided with shoes and stockings, and the rest of it."

"And be a voluntary burden beyond what I earns! Never;—not as long as Miss Mary is coming to live here as missus of your house. I should do summat as I should have to repent of. But, Mr Whittlestaff, I've got to look the world in the face, and bear my own crosses. I never can do it no younger."

"You're an old woman now, and you talk of throwing yourself upon the world without the means of earning a shilling."

“I think I'd earn some, at something, old as I am, till I fell down flat dead,” she said. “I have that sperit in me, that I'd still be doing something. But it don't signify; I'm not going to remain here when Miss Mary is to be put over me. That's the long and the short of it all.”

Now had come the moment in which, if ever, Mr Whittlestaff must get the strength which he required. He was quite sure of the old woman,—that her opinion would not be in the least influenced by any desire on her own part to retain her position as his housekeeper. “I don't know about putting Miss Mary over you,” he said.

“Don't know about it!” she shouted.

“My mind is not absolutely fixed.”

“'As she said anything?”

“Not a word.”

“Or he? Has he been and dared to speak up about Miss Mary. And he,—who, as far as I can understand, has never done a ha'porth for

her since the beginning. What's Mr Gordon? I should like to know. Diamonds! What's diamonds in the way of a steady income? They're all a flash in the pan, and moonshine and dirtiness. I hates to hear of diamonds. There's all the ill in the world comes from them; and you'd give her up to be taken off by such a one as he among the diamonds! I make bold to tell you, Mr Whittlestaff, that you ought to have more strength of mind than what that comes to. You're telling me every day as I'm an old fool."

"So you are."

"I didn't never contradict you; nor I don't mean, if you tells me so as often again. And I don't mean to be that impident as to tell my master as I ain't the only fool about the place. It wouldn't be no wise becoming."

"But you think it would be true."

"I says nothing about that. That's not the sort of language anybody has heard to come out of my mouth, either before your face or



behind your back. But I do say as a man ought to behave like a man. What! Give up to a chap as spends his time in digging for diamonds! Never!"

"What does it matter what he digs for; you know nothing about his business."

"But I know something about yours, Mr Whittlestaff. I know where you have set your wishes. And I know that when a man has made up his mind in such an affair as this, he shouldn't give way to any young diamond dealer of them all."

"Not to him."

"And what's she? Are you to give up everything because she's love-sick for a day or two? Is everything to be knocked to pieces here at Croker's Hall, because he has come and made eyes at her? She was glad enough to take what you offered before he had come this way."

"She was not glad enough. That is it. She was not glad enough."

"She took you, at any rate, and I'd never

make myself mean enough to make way for such a fellow as that."

"It isn't for him, Mrs Baggett."

"It is for him. Who else? To walk away and just leave the game open because he has come down to Hampshire! There ain't no spirit of standing up and fighting about it."

"With whom am I to fight?"

"With both of 'em;—till you have your own way. A foolish, stupid, weak girl like that!"

"I won't have her abused."

"She's very well. I ain't a-saying nothing against her. If she'll do what you bid her, she'll turn out right enough. You asked her, and she said she'd do it. Is not that so? There's nothing I hate so much as them romantic ways. And everything is to be made to give way because a young chap is six foot high! I hates romance and manly beauty, as they call it, and all the rest of it. Where is she to get her bread and meat? That's what I want to know."

"There'll be bread and meat for her."

"I dare say. But you'll have to pay for it, while she's philandering about with him! And that's what you call fine feelings. I call it all rubbish. If you've a mind to make her Mrs Whittlestaff, make her Mrs Whittlestaff. Drat them fine feelings. I never knew no good come of what people call fine feelings. If a young woman does her work as it should be, she's got no time to think of 'em. And if a man is master, he should be master. How's a man to give way to a girl like that, and then stand up and face the world around him? A man has to be master; and when he's come to be a little old-like, he has to see that he will be master. I never knew no good come of one of them soft-going fellows who is minded to give up whenever a woman wants anything. What's a woman? It ain't natural that she should have her way; and she don't like a man a bit better in the long-run because he lets her. There's Miss Mary; if you're stiff with her

now, she'll come out right enough in a month or two. She's lived without Mr Gordon well enough since she's been here. Now he's come, and we hear a deal about these fine feelings. You take my word, and say nothing to nobody about the young man. He's gone by this time, or he's a-going. Let him go, say I; and if Miss Mary takes on to whimper a bit, don't you see it."

Mrs Baggett took her departure, and Mr Whittlestaff felt that he had received the comfort, or at any rate the strength, of which he had been in quest. In all that the woman had said to him, there had been a re-echo of his own thoughts,—of one side, at any rate, of his own thoughts. He knew that true affection, and the substantial comforts of the world, would hold their own against all romance. And he did not believe,—in his theory of ethics he did not believe,—that by yielding to what Mrs Baggett called fine feelings, he would in the long-run do good to those with whom he was concerned in the world. Were he to

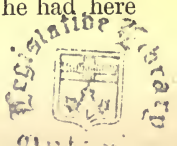
marry Mary Lawrie now, Mary Whittlestaff would, he thought, in ten years' time, be a happier woman than were he to leave her. That was the solid conviction of his mind, and in that he had been strengthened by Mrs Baggett's arguments. He had desired to be so strengthened, and therefore his interview had been successful.

But as the minutes passed by, as every quarter of an hour added itself to the quarters that were gone, and as the hours grew on, and the weakness of evening fell upon him, all his softness came back again. They had dined at six o'clock, and at seven he declared his purpose of strolling out by himself. On these summer evenings he would often take Mary with him; but he now told her, with a sort of apology, that he would rather go alone. "Do," she said, smiling up into his face; "don't let me ever be in your way. Of course, a man does not always want to have to find conversation for a young lady."

“If you are the young lady, I should always want it—only that I have things to think of.”

“Go and think of your things. I will sit in the garden and do my stitching.”

About a mile distant, where the downs began to rise, there was a walk supposed to be common to all who chose to frequent it, but which was entered through a gate which gave the place within the appearance of privacy. There was a little lake inside crowded with water-lilies, when the time for the water-lilies had come; and above the lake a path ran up through the woods, very steep, and as it rose higher and higher, altogether sheltered. It was about a mile in length till another gate was reached; but during the mile the wanderer could go off on either side, and lose himself on the grass among the beech-trees. It was a favourite haunt with Mr Whittlestaff. Here he was wont to sit and read his Horace, and think of the affairs of the world as Horace depicted them. Many a morsel of wisdom he had here



made his own, and had then endeavoured to think whether the wisdom had in truth been taken home by the poet to his own bosom, or had only been a glitter of the intellect, never appropriated for any useful purpose. “‘Gemmas, marmor, ebur,’” he had said. “‘Sunt qui non habeant; est qui non curat habere.’ I suppose he did care for jewels, marble, and ivory, as much as any one. ‘Me lentus Glyceræ torret amor meæ.’ I don’t suppose he ever loved her really, or any other girl.” Thus he would think over his Horace, always having the volume in his pocket.

Now he went there. But when he had sat himself down in a spot to which he was accustomed, he had no need to take out his Horace. His own thoughts came to him free enough without any need of his looking for them to poetry. After all, was not Mrs Baggett’s teaching a damnable philosophy? Let the man be the master, and let him get everything he can for himself, and enjoy to the best

of his ability all that he can get. That was the lesson as taught by her. But as he sat alone there beneath the trees, he told himself that no teaching was more damnable. Of course it was the teaching by which the world was kept going in its present course; but when divested of its plumage was it not absolutely the philosophy of selfishness? Because he was a man, and as a man had power and money and capacity to do the things after which his heart lusted, he was to do them for his own gratification, let the consequences be what they might to one whom he told himself that he loved! Did the lessons of Mrs Baggett run smoothly with those of Jesus Christ?

Then within his own mind he again took Mrs Baggett's side of the question. How mean a creature must he not become, if he were now to surrender this girl whom he was anxious to make his wife! He knew of himself that in such a matter he was more sensitive than others. He could not let her go, and

then walk forth as though little or nothing were the matter with him. Now for the second time in his life he had essayed to marry. And now for the second time all the world would know that he had been accepted and then rejected. It was, he thought, more than he could endure,—and live.

Then after he had sat there for an hour he got up and walked home; and as he went he tried to resolve that he would reject the philosophy of Mrs Baggett and accept the other. "If I only knew!" he said as he entered his own gate. "If one could only see clearly!" Then he found Mary still seated in the garden. "Nothing is to be got," he said, "by asking you for an answer."

"In what have I failed?"

"Never mind. Let us go in and have a cup of tea." But she knew well in what he accused her of failing, and her heart turned towards him again.

CHAPTER XVII.

MR WHITTLESTAFF MEDITATES A JOURNEY.

THE next day was Sunday, and was passed in absolute tranquillity. Nothing was said either by Mr Whittlestaff or by Mary Lawrie; nor, to the eyes of those among whom they lived, was there anything to show that their minds were disturbed. They went to church in the morning, as was usual with them, and Mary went also to the evening service. It was quite pleasant to see Mrs Baggett start for her slow Sabbath morning walk, and to observe how her appearance altogether belied that idea of rags and tatters which she had given as to her own wardrobe. A nicer dressed old lady, or a more becoming black silk gown,

you shall not see on a Sunday morning making her way to any country church in England. While she was looking so pleasant and demure,—one may say almost so handsome, in her old-fashioned and apparently new bonnet,—what could have been her thoughts respecting the red-nosed, one-legged warrior, and her intended life, to be passed in fetching two-penn'orths of gin for him, and her endeavours to get for him a morsel of wholesome food? She had had her breakfast out of her own china teacup, which she used to boast was her own property, as it had been given to her by Mr Whittlestaff's mother, and had had her little drop of cream, and, to tell the truth, her boiled egg, which she always had on a Sunday morning, to enable her to listen to the long sermon of the Rev. Mr Lowlad. She would talk of her hopes and her burdens, and undoubtedly she was in earnest. But she certainly did seem to make her hay very comfortably while the sun shone.

Everything on this Sunday morning was pleasant, or apparently pleasant, at Croker's Hall. In the evening, when Mary and the maid-servants went to church, leaving Mrs Baggett at home to look after the house and go to sleep, Mr Whittlestaff walked off to the wooded path with his Horace. He did not read it very long. The bits which he did usually read never amounted to much at a time. He would take a few lines and then digest them thoroughly, wailing over them or rejoicing, as the case might be. He was not at the present moment much given to joy. "*Intermissa, Venus, diu rursus bella moves? Parce, precor, precor.*" This was the passage to which he turned at the present moment; and very little was the consolation which he found in it. What was so crafty, he said to himself, or so vain as that an old man should hark back to the pleasures of a time of life which was past and gone! "*Non sum qualis eram,*" he said, and then thought with

shame of the time when he had been jilted by Catherine Bailey,—the time in which he had certainly been young enough to love and be loved, had he been as lovable as he had been prone to love. Then he put the book in his pocket. His latter effort had been to recover something of the sweetness of life, and not, as had been the poet's, to drain those dregs to the bottom. But when he got home he bade Mary tell him what Mr Lowlad had said in his sermon, and was quite cheery in his manner of picking Mr Lowlad's theology to pieces;—for Mr Whittlestaff did not altogether agree with Mr Lowlad as to the uses to be made of the Sabbath.

On the next morning he began to bustle about a little, as was usual with him before he made a journey; and it did escape him, while he was talking to Mrs Baggett about a pair of trousers which it turned out that he had given away last summer, that he meditated a journey to London on the next day.

"You ain't a-going?" said Mrs Baggett.

"I think I shall."

"Then don't. Take my word for it, sir,—don't." But Mr Whittlestaff only snubbed her, and nothing more was said about the journey at the moment.

In the course of the afternoon visitors came. Miss Evelina Hall with Miss Forrester had been driven into Alresford, and now called in company with Mr Blake. Mr Blake was full of his own good tidings, but not so full but that he could remember, before he took his departure, to say a half whispered word on behalf of John Gordon. "What do you think, Mr Whittlestaff? Since you were at Little Alresford we've settled the day."

"You needn't be telling it to everybody about the county," said Kattie Forrester.

"Why shouldn't I tell it to my particular friends? I am sure Miss Lawrie will be delighted to hear it."

"Indeed I am," said Mary.

“And Mr Whittlestaff also. Are you not, Mr Whittlestaff?”

“I am very happy to hear that a couple whom I like so well are soon to be made happy. But you have not yet told us the day.”

“The 1st of August,” said Evelina Hall.

“The 1st of August,” said Mr Blake, “is an auspicious day. I am sure there is some reason for regarding it as auspicious, though I cannot exactly remember what. It is something about Augustus, I think.”

“I never heard of such an idea to come from a clergyman of the Church of England,” said the bride. “I declare Montagu never seems to think that he’s a clergyman at all.”

“It will be better for him,” said Mr Whittlestaff, “and for all those about him, that he should ever remember the fact and never seem to do so.”

“All the same,” said Blake, “although the 1st of August is auspicious, I was very anxious

to be married in July, only the painters said they couldn't be done with the house in time. One is obliged to go by what these sort of people say and do. We're to have a month's honeymoon,—only just a month, because Mr Lowlad won't make himself as agreeable as he ought to do about the services; and Newface, the plumber and glazier, says he can't have the house done as Kattie would like to live in it before the end of August. Where do you think we're going to, Miss Lawrie? You would never guess."

"Perhaps to Rome," said Mary, at a shot.

"Not quite so far. We're going to the Isle of Wight. It's rather remarkable that I never spent but one week in the Isle of Wight since I was born. We haven't quite made up our mind whether it's to be Black Gang Chine or Ventnor. It's a matter of dresses, you see."

"Don't be a fool, Montagu," said Miss Forrester.

"Well, it is. If we decide upon Ventnor, she

must have frocks and things to come out with."

"I suppose so," said Mr Whittlestaff.

"But she'll want nothing of the kind at Black Gang."

"Do hold your tongue, and not make an ass of yourself. What do you know what dresses I shall want? As it is, I don't think I shall go either to the one place or the other. The Smiths are at Ryde, and the girls are my great friends. I think we'll go to Ryde, after all."

"I'm so sorry, Mr Whittlestaff, that we can't expect the pleasure of seeing you at our wedding. It is, of course, imperative that Kattie should be married in the cathedral. Her father is one of the dignitaries, and could not bear not to put his best foot foremost on such an occasion. The Dean will be there, of course. I'm afraid the Bishop cannot come up from Farnham, because he will have friends with him. I am afraid John Gordon will have gone by that time, or else we certainly would have had him

down. I should like John Gordon to be present, because he would see how the kind of thing is done." The name of John Gordon at once silenced all the matrimonial chit-chat which was going on among them. It was manifest both to Mr Whittlestaff and to Mary that it had been lugged in without a cause, to enable Mr Blake to talk about the absent man. "It would have been pleasant; eh, Kattie?"

"We should have been very glad to see Mr Gordon, if it would have suited him to come," said Miss Forrester.

"It would have been just the thing for him; and we at Oxford together, and everything. Don't you think he would have liked to be there? It would have put him in mind of other things, you know."

To this appeal there was no answer made. It was impossible that Mary should bring herself to talk about John Gordon in mixed company. And the allusion to him stirred Mr Whittlestaff's wrath. Of course it was under-

stood as having been spoken in Mary's favour. And Mr Whittlestaff had been made to perceive by what had passed at Little Alresford that the Little Alresford people all took the side of John Gordon, and were supposed to be taking the side of Mary at the same time. There was not one of them, he said to himself, that had half the sense of Mrs Baggett. And there was a vulgarity about their interference of which Mrs Baggett was not guilty.

"He is half way on his road to the diamond-fields," said Evelina.

"And went away from here on Saturday morning!" said Montagu Blake. "He has not started yet,—not dreamed of it. I heard him whisper to Mr Whittlestaff about his address. He's to be in London at his club. I didn't hear him say for how long, but when a man gives his address at his club he doesn't mean to go away at once. I have a plan in my head. Some of those boats go to the diamond-fields from Southampton. All the steamers go every-

where from Southampton. Winchester is on the way to Southampton. Nothing will be easier for him than to drop in for our marriage on his way out. That is, if he must go at last." Then he looked hard at Mary Lawrie.

"And bring some of his diamonds with him," said Evelina Hall. "That would be very nice." But not a word more was said then about John Gordon by the inhabitants of Croker's Hall. After that the visitors went, and Montagu Blake chaperoned the girls out of the house, without an idea that he had made himself disagreeable.

"That young man is a most egregious ass," said Mr Whittlestaff.

"He is good-natured and simple, but I doubt whether he sees things very plainly."

"He has not an idea of what a man may talk about and when he should hold his tongue. And he is such a fool as to think that his idle chatter can influence others. I don't suppose a bishop can refuse to ordain a gentleman be-

cause he is a general idiot. Otherwise I think the bishop is responsible for letting in such an ass as this." Mary said to herself, as she heard this, that it was the most ill-natured remark which she had ever known to fall from the mouth of Mr Whittlestaff.

"I think I am going away for a few days," Mr Whittlestaff said to Mary, when the visitors were gone.

"Where are you going?"

"Well, I suppose I shall be in London. "When one goes anywhere, it is generally to London; though I haven't been there for more than two months."

"Not since I came to live with you," she said. "You are the most stay-at-home person by way of a gentleman that I ever heard of." Then there was a pause for a few minutes, and he said nothing further. "Might a person ask what you are going for?" This she asked in the playful manner which she knew he would take in good part.

“Well ; I don’t quite know that a person can. I am going to see a man upon business, and if I began to tell you part of it, I must tell it all,—which would not be convenient.”

“May I not ask how long you will be away? There can’t be any dreadful secret in that. And I shall want to know what to get for your dinner when you come back.” She was standing now at his elbow, and he was holding her by the arm. It was to him almost as though she were already his wife, and the feeling to him was very pleasant. Only if she were his wife, or if it were positively decided among them that she would become so, he would certainly tell her the reason for which he might undertake any journey. Indeed there was no reason connected with any business of his which might not be told, other than that special reason which was about to take him to London. He only answered her now by pressing her hand and smiling into her face. “Will it be for a month?”

"Oh dear, no! what should I do away from home for a month?"

"How can I tell? The mysterious business may require you to be absent for a whole year. Fancy my being left at home all that time. You don't think of it; but you have never left me for a single night since you first brought me to live here."

"And you have never been away."

"Oh, no! why should I go away? What business can a woman have to move from home, especially such a woman as I am."

"You are just like Mrs Baggett. She always talks of women with supreme contempt. And yet she is just as proud of herself as the queen when you come to contradict her."

"You never contradict me."

"Perhaps the day may come when I shall." Then he recollected himself, and added, "Or perhaps the day may never come. Never mind. Put up my things for one week. At

any rate I shall not be above a week gone." Then she left him, and went away to his room to do what was necessary.

She knew the business on which he was about to travel to London, as well as though he had discussed with her the whole affair. In the course of the last two or three days there had been moments in which she had declared to herself that he was cruel. There had been moments in which she had fainted almost with sorrow when she thought of the life which fate had in store for her. There must be endless misery, while there might have been joy, so ecstatic in its nature as to make it seem to her to be perennial. Then she had almost fallen, and had declared him to be preternaturally cruel. But these moments had been short, and had endured only while she had allowed herself to dream of the ecstatic joy, which she confessed to herself to be an unfit condition of life for her. And then she had told herself that Mr Whittlestaff was not cruel,



and that she herself was no better than a weak, poor, flighty creature unable to look in its face life and all its realities. And then she would be lost in amazement as she thought of herself and all her vacillations.

She now was resolved to take his part, and to fight his battle to the end. When he had told her that he was going up to London, and going up on business as to which he could tell her nothing, she knew that it behoved her to prevent him from taking the journey. John Gordon should be allowed to go in quest of his diamonds, and Mr Whittlestaff should be persuaded not to interfere with him. It was for her sake, and not for John Gordon's, that he was about to make the journey. He had asked her whether she were willing to marry him, and she had told him that he was pressing her too hard. She would tell him now,—now before it was too late,—that this was not so. His journey to London must at any rate be prevented.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MR AND MRS TOOKEY.

ON the day arranged, early on the morning after the dinner at Little Alresford Park, John Gordon went up to London. He had not been much moved by the intimation made to him by Mr Whittlestaff that some letter should be written to him at his London address. He had made his appeal to Mr Whittlestaff, and had received no answer whatever. And he had, after a fashion, made his appeal also to the girl. He felt sure that his plea must reach her. His very presence then in this house had been an appeal to her. He knew that she so far believed in him as to be conscious that she could at once become

his wife—if she were willing to throw over his rival. He knew also that she loved him,—or had certainly loved him. He did not know the nature of her regard; nor was it possible that he should ever know that,—unless she were his wife. She had given a promise to that other man, and—it was thus he read her character—she could be true to her promise without any great heart-break. At any rate, she intended to be true to it. He did not for a moment suspect that Mr Whittlestaff was false. Mary had declared that she would not withdraw her word,—that only from her own mouth was to be taken her intention of such withdrawal, and that such intention she certainly would never utter. Of her character he understood much,—but not quite all. He was not aware of the depth of her feeling. But Mr Whittlestaff he did not understand at all. Of all those vacillating softnesses he knew nothing,—or of those moments spent with the poet, in which he was wont to fight

against the poet's pretences, and of those other moments spent with Mrs Baggett, in which he would listen to, and always finally reject, those invitations to manly strength which she would always pour into his ears. That Mr Whittlestaff should spend hour after hour, and now day after day, in teaching himself to regard nothing but what might best suit the girl's happiness,—of that he was altogether in the dark. To his thinking, Mr Whittlestaff was a hard man, who, having gained his object, intended to hold fast by what he had gained. He, John Gordon, knew, or thought that he knew, that Mary, as his wife, would lead a happier life than with Mr Whittlestaff. But things had turned out unfortunately, and there was nothing for him but to return to the diamond-fields.

Therefore he had gone back to London with the purpose of preparing for his journey. A man does not start for South Africa to-morrow, or, if not to-morrow, then the next day. He

was aware that there must be some delay ; but any place would be better in which to stay than the neighbourhood of Croker's Hall. There were things which must be done, and people with whom he must do it ; but of all that, he need say nothing down at Alresford. Therefore, when he got back to London, he meant to make all his arrangements—and did so far settle his affairs as to take a berth on board one of the mail steamers.

He had come over in company with a certain lawyer, who had gone out to Kimberley with a view to his profession, and had then, as is the case with all the world that goes to Kimberley, gone into diamonds. Diamonds had become more to him than either briefs or pleadings. He had been there for fifteen years, and had ruined himself and made himself half-a-dozen times. He had found diamonds to be more pleasant than law, and to be more compatible with champagne, tinned lobsters, and young ladies. He had married a wife, and had

parted with her, and taken another man's wife, and paid for her with diamonds. He had then possessed nothing, and had afterwards come forth a third-part owner of the important Stick-in-the-Mud claim, which at one time was paying 12 per cent per month. It must be understood that the Stick-in-the-Mud claim was an almost infinitesimal portion of soil in the Great Kimberley mine. It was but the sixteenth part of an original sub-division. But from the centre of the great basin, or rather bowl, which forms the mine, there ran up two wires to the high mound erected on the circumference, on which continually two iron cages were travelling up and down, coming back empty, but going up laden with gemmiferous dirt. Here travelled the diamonds of the Stick-in-the-Mud claim, the owner of one-third of which, Mr Fitzwalker Tookey, had come home with John Gordon.

Taking a first general glance at affairs in the diamond-fields, I doubt whether we should have

been inclined to suspect that John Gordon and Fitzwalker Tookey would have been likely to come together as partners in a diamond speculation. But John Gordon had in the course of things become owner of the other two shares, and when Fitzwalker Tookey determined to come home, he had done so with the object of buying his partner's interest. This he might have done at once,—only that he suffered under the privation of an insufficiency of means. He was a man of great intelligence, and knew well that no readier mode to wealth had ever presented itself to him than the purchase of his partner's shares. Much was said to persuade John Gordon; but he would not part with his documents without seeing security for his money. Therefore Messrs Gordon and Tookey put the old Stick-in-the-Mud into the hands of competent lawyers, and came home together.

“I am not at all sure that I shall sell,” John Gordon had said.

“But I thought that you offered it.”

“ Yes ; for money down. For the sum named I will sell now. But if I start from here without completing the bargain, I shall keep the option in my own hands. The fact is, I do not know whether I shall remain in England or return. If I do come back I am not likely to find anything better than the old Stick-in-the-Mud.” To this Mr Tookey assented, but still he resolved that he would go home. Hence it came to pass that Mr Fitzwalker Tookey was now in London, and that John Gordon had to see him frequently. Here Tookey had found another would-be partner, who had the needed money, and it was fervently desired by Mr Tookey that John Gordon might not go back to South Africa.

The two men were not at all like in their proclivities ; but they had been thrown together, and each had learned much of the inside life of the other. The sort of acquaintance with whom a steady man becomes intimate in such a locality often surprises the steady man him-

self. Fitzwalker Tookey had the antecedents and education of a gentleman. Champagne and lobster suppers—the lobster coming out of tin cases,—diamonds and strange ladies, even with bloated cheeks and strong language, had not altogether destroyed the vestiges of the Temple. He at any rate was fond of a companion with whom he could discuss his English regrets, and John Gordon was not inclined to shut himself up altogether among his precious stones, and to refuse the conversation of a man who could talk. Tookey had told him of his great distress in reference to his wife. “By G——! you know, the cruellest thing you ever heard in the world. I was a little tight one night, and the next morning she was off with Atkinson, who got away with his pocket full of diamonds. Poor girl! she went down to the Portuguese settlement, and he was nabbed. He’s doing penal service now down at Cape Town. That’s a kind of thing that does upset a fellow.” And poor Fitzwalker began to cry.

Among such confidences Gordon allowed it to escape from him that were he to become married in England, he did not think it probable that he should return. Thus it was known, at least to his partner, that he was going to look for a wife, and the desire in Mr Tookey's breast that the wife might be forthcoming was intense. "Well!" he said, immediately on Gordon's return to London.

"What does 'well' mean?"

"Of course you went down there to look after the lady."

"I have never told you so."

"But you did—did you not?"

"I have told you nothing about any lady, though you are constantly asking questions. As a fact, I think I shall go back next month."

"To Kimberley?"

"I think so. The stake I have there is of too great importance to be abandoned."

"I have the money ready to pay over;—abso-

lute cash on the nail. You don't call that abandoning it?"

"The claim has gone up in value 25 per cent, as you have already heard."

"Yes; it has gone up a little, but not so much as that. It will come down as much by the next mail. With diamonds you never can stick to anything."

"That's true. But you can only go by the prices as you see them quoted. They may be up 25 per cent again by next mail. At any rate, I am going back."

"The devil you are!"

"That's my present idea. As I like to be on the square with you altogether, I don't mind saying that I have booked a berth by the Kentucky Castle."

"The deuce you have! And you won't take a wife with you?"

"I am not aware that I shall have such an impediment."

Then Fitzwalker Tookey assumed a very long

face. It is difficult to trace the workings of such a man's mind, or to calculate the meagre chances on which he is too often driven to base his hopes of success. He feared that he could not show his face in Kimberley, unless as the representative of the whole old Stick-in-the-Mud. And with that object he had declared himself in London to have the actual power of disposing of Gordon's shares. Gordon had gone down to Hampshire, and would no doubt be successful with the young lady. At any rate,—as he described it to himself,—he had “gone in for that.” He could see his way in that direction, but in no other. “Upon my word, this, you know, is—what I call—rather throwing a fellow over.”

“I am as good as my word.”

“I don't know about that, Gordon.”

“But I do, and I won't hear any assertion to the contrary. I offered you the shares for a certain price, and you rejected them.”

“I did not do that.”

"You did do that,—exactly. Then there came up in my mind a feeling that I might probably wish to change my purpose."

"And I am to suffer for that."

"Not in the least. I then told you that you should still have the shares for the price named. But I did not offer them to any one else. So I came home,—and you chose to come with me. But before I started, and again after, I told you that the offer did not hold good, and that I should not make up my mind as to selling till after I got to England."

"We understood that you meant to be married."

"I never said so. I never said a word about marriage. I am now going back, and mean to manage the mine myself."

"Without asking me?"

"Yes; I shall ask you. But I have two-thirds. I will give you for your share 10 per cent more than the price you offered me for each of my shares. If you do not like that, you

need not accept the offer ; but I don't mean to have any more words about it."

Mr Fitzwalker Tookey's face became longer and longer, and he did in truth feel himself to be much aggrieved within his very soul. There were still two lines of conduct open to him. He might move the stern man by a recapitulation of the sorrow of his circumstances, or he might burst out into passionate wrath, and lay all his ruin to his partner's doing. He might still hope that in this latter way he could rouse all Kimberley against Gordon, and thus creep back into some vestige of property under the shadow of Gordon's iniquities. He would try both. He would first endeavour to move the stern man to pity. "I don't think you can imagine the condition in which you are about to place me."

"I can't admit that I am placing you anywhere."

"I'll just explain. Of course I know that I can tell you everything in strictest confidence."

"I don't know it at all."

"Oh yes; I can. You remember the story of my poor wife?"

"Yes; I remember."

"She's in London now."

"What! She got back from the Portuguese settlement?"

"Yes. She did not stay there long. I don't suppose that the Portuguese are very nice people."

"Perhaps not."

"At any rate they don't have much money among them."

"Not after the lavish expenditure of the diamond-fields," suggested Gordon.

"Just so. Poor Matilda had been accustomed to all that money could buy for her. I never used to be close-fisted with her, though sometimes I would be tight."

"As far as I could understand, you never used to agree at all."

"I don't think we did hit it off. Perhaps it was my fault."

"You used to be a little free in your way of living."

"I was. I confess that I was so. I was young then, but I am older now. I haven't touched a B. and S. before eleven o'clock since I have been in London above two or three times. I do mean to do the best I can for my young family." It was the fact that Mr Tookey had three little children boarding out in Kimberley.

"And what is the lady doing in London?"

"To tell the truth, she's at my lodgings."

"Oh—h!"

"I do admit it. She is."

"She is indifferent to the gentleman in the Cape Town penal settlement?"

"Altogether, I don't think she ever really cared for him. To tell the truth, she only wanted some one to take her away from—me."

"And now she trusts you again?"

"Oh dear, yes;—completely. She is my wife, you know, still."

"I suppose so."

"That sacred tie has never been severed. You must always remember that. I don't know what your feelings are on such a subject, but according to my views it should not be severed roughly. When there are children, that should always be borne in mind. Don't you think so?"

"The children should be borne in mind."

"Just so. That's what I mean. Who can look after a family of young children so well as their young mother? Men have various ways of looking at the matter." To this John Gordon gave his ready consent, and was anxious to hear in what way his assistance was to be asked in again putting Mr and Mrs Tookey, with their young children, respectably on their feet. "There are men, you know, stand-off sort of fellows, who think that a woman should never be forgiven."

"It must depend on how far the husband has been in fault."

“Exactly. Now these stand-off sort of fellows will never admit that they have been in fault at all. That’s not my case.”

“You drank a little.”

“For the matter of that, so did she. When a woman drinks she gets herself to bed somehow. A man gets out upon a spree. That’s what I used to do, and then I would hit about me rather recklessly. I have no doubt Matilda did get it sometimes. When there has been that kind of thing, forgive and forget is the best thing you can do.”

“I suppose so.”

“And then at the Fields there isn’t the same sort of prudish life which one is accustomed to in England. Here in London a man is nowhere if he takes his wife back. Nobody knows her, because there are plenty to know of another sort. But there things are not quite so strict. Of course she oughtn’t to have gone off with Atkinson ;—a vulgar low fellow, too.”

“And you oughtn’t to have licked her.”

"That's just it. It was tit for tat, I think. That's the way I look at it. At any rate we are living together now, and no one can say we're not man and wife."

"There'll be a deal of trouble saved in that way."

"A great deal. We are man and wife, and can begin again as though nothing had happened. No one can say that black's the white of our eye. She'll take to those darling children as though nothing had happened. You can't conceive how anxious she is to get back to them. And there's no other impediment. That's a comfort."

"Another impediment would have upset you rather?"

"I couldn't have put up with that." Mr Fitzwalker Tookey looked very grave and high-minded as he made the assertion. "But there's nothing of that kind. It's all open sailing. Now,—what are we to live upon, just for a beginning?"

“You have means out there.”

“Not as things are at present,—I am sorry to say. To tell the truth, my third share of the old Stick-in-the-Mud is gone. I had to raise money when it was desirable that I should come with you.”

“Not on my account.”

“And then I did owe something. At any rate, it's all gone now. I should find myself stranded at Kimberley without a red cent.”

“What can I do?”

“Well,—I will explain. Poker & Hodge will buy your shares for the sum named. Joshua Poker, who is out there, has got my third share. Poker & Hodge have the money down, and when I have arranged the sale, will undertake to give me the agency at one per cent on the whole take for three years certain. That'll be £1000 a-year, and it's odd if I can't float myself again in that time.” Gordon stood silent, scratching his head. “Or if you'd give me the agency on the same terms, it would be

the same thing. I don't care a straw for Poker & Hodge."

"I daresay not."

"But you'd find me as true as steel."

"What little good I did at the Fields I did by looking after my own business."

"Then what do you propose? Let Poker & Hodge have them, and I shall bless you for ever." To this mild appeal Mr Tookey had been brought by the manner in which John Gordon had scratched his head. "I think you are bound to do it, you know." To this he was brought by the subsequent look which appeared in John Gordon's eyes.

"I think not."

"Men will say so."

"I don't care a straw what men say, or women."

"And you to come back in the same ship with me and my wife! You couldn't do it. The Fields wouldn't receive you." Gordon be-thought himself whether this imagined rejec-

tion might not arise rather from the character of his travelling companions. "To bring back the mother of three little sainted babes, and then to walk in upon every shilling of property which had belonged to their father! You never could hold up your head in Kimberley again."

"I should have to stand abashed before your virtue?"

"Yes, you would. I should be known to have come back with my poor repentant wife, —the mother of three dear babes. And she would be known to have returned with her misguided husband. The humanity of the Fields would not utter a word of reproof to either of us. But, upon my word, I should not like to stand in your shoes. And how you could sit opposite to her and look her in the face on the journey out, I don't know."

"It would be unpleasant."

"Deuced unpleasant, I should say. You remember the old Roman saying, 'Never be



conscious of anything within your own bosom.' Only think how you would feel when you were swelling it about in Kimberley, while that poor lady won't be able to buy a pair of boots for herself or her children. I say nothing about myself. I didn't think you were the man to do it;—I didn't indeed."

Gordon did find himself moved by the diversity of lights through which he was made to look at the circumstances in question. In the first place, there was the journey back with Mr Tookey and his wife, companions he had not anticipated. The lady would probably begin by soliciting his intimacy, which on board ship he could hardly refuse. With a fellow-passenger, whose husband has been your partner, you must quarrel bitterly or be warm friends. Upon the whole, he thought that he could not travel to South Africa with Mr and Mrs Fitzwalker Tookey. And then he understood what the man's tongue would do if he were there for a month in advance. The whole picture of life,

too, at the Fields was not made attractive by Mr Tookey's description. He was not afraid of the reception which might be accorded to Mrs Tookey, but saw that Tookey found himself able to threaten him with violent evils, simply because he would claim his own. Then there shot across his brain some reminiscence of Mary Lawrie, and a comparison between her and her life and the sort of life which a man must lead under the auspices of Mrs Tookey. Mary Lawrie was altogether beyond his reach; but it would be better to have her to think of than the other to know. His idea of the diamond-fields was disturbed by the promised return of his late partner and his wife.

"And you mean to reduce me to this misery?" asked Mr Tookey.

"I don't care a straw for your misery."

"What!"

"Not for your picture of your misery. I do not doubt but that when you have been there



for a month you will be drunk as often as ever, and just as free with your fists when a woman comes in your way."

"Never!"

"And I do not see that I am at all bound to provide for you and for your wife and children. You have seen many ups and downs, and will be doomed to see many more, as long as you can get hold of a bottle of wine."

"I mean to take the pledge,—I do indeed. I must do it gradually, because of my constitution,—but I shall do it."

"I don't in the least believe in it;—nor do I believe in any man who thinks to redeem himself after such a fashion. It may still be possible that I shall not go back."

"Thank God!"

"I may kill beasts in Buenos Ayres, or take a tea-farm in Thibet, or join the colonists in Tennessee. In that case I will let you know what arrangement I may propose to make about the Kimberley claim. At any rate, I may say

this,—I shall not go back in the same vessel with you.”

“I thought it would have been so comfortable.”

“You and Mrs Tookey would find yourself more at your ease without me.”

“Not in the least. Don’t let that thought disturb you. Whatever misery fate may have in store for me, you will always find that, for the hour, I will endeavour to be a good companion. ‘Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof.’ That is the first of my mottoes.”

“At any rate, I shall not go back in the Kentucky Castle if you do.”

“I’m afraid our money is paid.”

“So is mine; but that does not signify. You have a week yet, and I will let you know by eleven o’clock on Thursday what steps I shall finally take. If in any way I can serve you, I will do so; but I can admit no claim.”

“A thousand thanks! And I am so glad you approve of what I have done about Matilda.

I'm sure that a steady-going fellow like you would have done the same." To this John Gordon could make no answer, but left his friend, and went away about his own business. He had to decide between Tennessee, Thibet, and Buenos Ayres, and wanted his time for his own purposes.

When he got to dinner at his club, he found a letter from Mr Whittlestaff, which had come by the day-mail. It was a letter which, for the time, drove Thibet and Buenos Ayres, and Tennessee also, clean out of his mind. It was as follows:—

"CROKER'S HALL, — *June 188—.*

"DEAR MR JOHN GORDON,—I shall be in town this afternoon, probably by the same train which will bring this letter, and will do myself the honour of calling upon you at your club the next day at twelve.—I am, dear Mr John Gordon, faithfully yours,

"WILLIAM WHITTLESTAFF."

Then there was to be an answer to the appeal which he had made. Of what nature would be the answer? As he laid his hand upon his heart, and felt the violence of the emotion to which he was subjected, he could not doubt the strength of his own love.

CHAPTER XIX.

MR WHITTLESTAFF'S JOURNEY DISCUSSED.

"I DON'T think that if I were you I would go up to London, Mr Whittlestaff," said Mary. This was on the Tuesday morning.

"Why not?"

"I don't think I would."

"Why should you interfere?"

"I know I ought not to interfere."

"I don't think you ought. Especially as I have taken the trouble to conceal what I am going about."

"I can guess," said Mary.

"You ought not to guess in such a matter. You ought not to have it on your mind at all. I told you that I would not tell you. I

shall go. That's all that I have got to say."

The words with which he spoke were ill-natured and savage. The reader will find them to be so, if he thinks of them. They were such that a father would hardly speak, under any circumstances, to a grown-up daughter,—much less that a lover would address to his mistress. And Mary was at present filling both capacities. She had been taken into his house almost as an adopted daughter, and had, since that time, had all the privileges accorded to her. She had now been promoted still higher, and had become his affianced bride. That the man should have turned upon her thus, in answer to her counsel, was savage, or at least ungracious. But at every word her heart became fuller and more full of an affection as for something almost divine. What other man had ever shown such love for any woman? and this love was shown to her,—who was nothing to him,—who ate the bread of charity in his house.

And it amounted to this, that he intended to give her up to another man,—he who had given such proof of his love,—he, of whom she knew that this was a question of almost life and death,—because in looking into his face she had met there the truth of his heart! Since that first avowal, made before Gordon had come,—made at a moment when some such avowal from her was necessary,—she had spoken no word as to John Gordon. She had endeavoured to show no sign. She had given herself up to her elder lover, and had endeavoured to have it understood that she had not intended to transfer herself because the other man had come across her path again like a flash of lightning. She had dined in company with her younger lover without exchanging a word with him. She had not allowed her eyes to fall upon him more than she could help, lest some expression of tenderness should be seen there. Not a word of hope had fallen from her lips when they had first met, because she had given herself

to another. She was sure of herself in that. No doubt there had come moments in which she had hoped—nay, almost expected—that the elder of the two might give her up; and when she had felt sure that it was not to be so, her very soul had rebelled against him. But as she had taken time to think of it, she had absolved him, and had turned her anger against herself. Whatever he wanted,—that she believed it would be her duty to do for him, as far as its achievement might be in her power.

She came round and put her arm upon him, and looked into his face. “Don’t go to London. I ask you not to go.”

“Why should I not go?”

“To oblige me. You pretend to have a secret, and refuse to say why you are going. Of course I know.”

“I have written a letter to say that I am coming.”

“It is still lying on the hall-table down-stairs. It will not go to the post till you have decided.”

“Who has dared to stop it?”

“I have. I have dared to stop it. I shall dare to put it in the fire and burn it. Don’t go! He is entitled to nothing. You are entitled to have,—whatever it is that you may want, though it is but such a trifle.”

“A trifle, Mary!”

“Yes. A woman has a little gleam of prettiness about her,—though here it is but of a common order.”

“Anything so uncommon I never came near before.”

“Let that pass; whether common or uncommon, it matters nothing. It is something soft, which will soon pass away, and of itself can do no good. It is contemptible.”

“You are just Mrs Baggett over again.”

“Very well; I am quite satisfied. Mrs Baggett is a good woman. She can do something beyond lying on a sofa and reading novels, while her good looks fade away. It is simply because a woman is pretty and weak that she

is made so much of, and is encouraged to neglect her duties. By God's help I will not neglect mine. Do not go to London."

He seemed as though he hesitated as he sat there under the spell of her little hand upon his shoulder. And in truth he did hesitate. Could it not be that he should be allowed to sit there all his days, and have her hand about his neck somewhat after this fashion? Was he bound to give it all up? What was it that ordinary selfishness allowed? What depth of self-indulgence amounted to a wickedness which a man could not permit himself to enjoy without absolutely hating himself? It would be easy in this case to have all that he wanted. He need not send the letter. He need not take this wretched journey to London. Looking forward, as he thought that he could look, judging from the girl's character, he believed that he would have all that he desired,—all that a gracious God could give him,—if he would make her the recognised partner of his

bed and his board. Then would he be proud when men should see what sort of a wife he had got for himself at last in place of Catherine Bailey. And why should she not love him? Did not all her words tend to show that there was love?

And then suddenly there came a frown across his face, as she stood looking at him. She was getting to know the manner of that frown. Now she stooped down to kiss it away from his brow. It was a brave thing to do; but she did it with a consciousness of her courage. "Now I may burn the letter," she said, as though she were about to depart upon the errand.

"No, by heaven!" he said. "Let me have a sandwich and a glass of wine, for I shall start in an hour."

With a glance of his thoughts he had answered all those questions. He had taught himself what ordinary selfishness allowed. Ordinary selfishness,—such selfishness as that of which he would have permitted himself the

indulgence,—must have allowed him to disregard the misery of John Gordon, and to keep the girl to himself. As far as John Gordon was concerned, he would not have cared for his sufferings. He was as much to himself,—or more,—than could be John Gordon. He did not love John Gordon, and could have doomed him to tearing his hair,—not without regret, but at any rate without remorse. He had settled that question. But with Mary Lawrie there must be a never-dying pang of self-accusation, were he to take her to his arms while her love was settled elsewhere. It was not that he feared her for himself, but that he feared himself for her sake. God had filled his heart with love of the girl,—and, if it was love, could it be that he would destroy her future for the gratification of his own feelings? “I tell you it is no good,” he said, as she crouched down beside him, almost sitting on his knee.

At this moment Mrs Baggett came into the room, detecting Mary almost in the embrace of

her old master. "He's come back again, sir," said Mrs Baggett.

"Who has come back?"

"The Sergeant."

"Then you may tell him to go about his business. He is not wanted, at any rate. You are to remain here, and have your own way, like an old fool."

"I am that, sir."

"There is not any one coming to interfere with you."

"Sir!"

Then Mary got up, and stood sobbing at the open window. "At any rate, you'll have to remain here to look after the house, even if I go away. Where is the Sergeant?"

"He's in the stable again."

"What! drunk?"

"Well, no; he's not drunk. I think his wooden leg is affected sooner than if he had two like mine, or yours, sir. And he did manage to go in of his self, now that he knows the

way. He's there among the hay, and I do think it's very unkind of Hayonotes to say as he'll spoil it. But how am I to get him out, unless I goes away with him?"

"Let him stay there and give him some dinner. I don't know what else you've to do."

"He can't stay always,—in course, sir. As Hayonotes says,—what's he to do with a wooden-legged sergeant in his stable as a permanence? I had come to say I was to go home with him."

"You're to do nothing of the kind."

"What is it you mean, then, about my taking care of the house?"

"Never you mind. When I want you to know, I shall tell you." Then Mrs Baggett bobbed her head three times in the direction of Mary Lawrie's back, as though to ask some question whether the leaving the house might not be in reference to Mary's marriage. But she feared that it was not made in reference to Mr Whittlestaff's marriage also. What had her master meant when he had said that there

was no one coming to interfere with her, Mrs Baggett? "You needn't ask any questions just at present, Mrs Baggett," he said.

"You don't mean as you are going up to London just to give her up to that young fellow?"

"I am going about my own business, and I won't be inquired into," said Mr Whittlestaff.

"Then you're going to do what no man ought to do."

"You are an impertinent old woman," said her master.

"I daresay I am. All the same, it's my duty to tell you my mind. You can't eat me, Mr Whittlestaff, and it wouldn't much matter if you could. When you've said that you'll do a thing, you ought not to go back for any other man, let him be who it may,—especially not in respect of a female. It's weak, and nobody wouldn't think a straw of you for doing it. It's some idea of being generous that you have got into your head. There ain't no real gener-

osity in it. I say it ain't manly, and that's what a man ought to be."

Mary, though she was standing at the window, pretending to look out of it, knew that during the whole of this conversation Mrs Baggett was making signs at her,—as though indicating an opinion that she was the person in fault. It was as though Mrs Baggett had said that it was for her sake,—to do something to gratify her,—that Mr Whittlestaff was about to go to London. She knew that she at any rate was not to blame. She was struggling for the same end as Mrs Baggett, and did deserve better treatment. "You oughtn't to bother going up to London, sir, on any such errand, and so I tells you, Mr Whittlestaff," said Mrs Baggett.

"I have told him the same thing myself," said Mary Lawrie, turning round.

"If you told him as though you meant it, he wouldn't go," said Mrs Baggett.

"That's all you know about it," said Mr

Whittlestaff. "Now the fact is, I won't stand this kind of thing. If you mean to remain here, you must be less free with your tongue."

"I don't mean to remain here, Mr Whittlestaff. It's just that as I'm coming to. There's Timothy Baggett is down there among the hosses, and he says as I am to go with him. So I've come up here to say that if he's allowed to sleep it off to-day, I'll be ready to start to-morrow."

"I tell you I am not going to make any change at all," said Mr Whittlestaff.

"You was saying you was going away,—for the honeymoon, I did suppose."

"A man may go away if he pleases, without any reason of that kind. Oh dear, oh dear, that letter is not gone! I insist that that letter should go. I suppose I must see about it myself." Then when he began to move, the women moved also. Mary went to look after the sandwiches, and Mrs Baggett to despatch the letter. In ten minutes the letter was gone, and

half an hour afterwards Mr Whittlestaff had himself driven down to the station.

"What is it he means, Miss?" said Mrs Baggett, when the master was come.

"I do not know," said Mary, who was in truth very angry with the old woman.

"He wants to make you Mrs Whittlestaff."

"In whatever he wants I shall obey him,—if I only knew how."

"It's what you is bound to do, Miss Mary. Think of what he has done for you."

"I require no one to tell me that."

"What did Mr Gordon come here for, disturbing everybody? Nobody asked him;—at least, I suppose nobody asked him." There was an insinuation in this which Mary found it hard to bear. But it was better to bear it than to argue on such a point with the servant. "And he said things which put the master about terribly."

"It was not my doing."

"But he's a man as needn't have his own

way. Why should Mr Gordon have everything just as he likes it? I never heard tell of Mr Gordon till he came here the other day. I don't think so much of Mr Gordon myself." To this Mary, of course, made no answer. "He's no business disturbing people when he's not sent for. I can't abide to see Mr Whittlestaff put about in this way. I have known him longer than you have."

"No doubt."

"He's a man that'll be driven pretty nigh out of his mind if he's disappointed." Then there was silence, as Mary was determined not to discuss the matter any further. "If you come to that, you needn't marry no one unless you pleases." Mary was still silent. "They shouldn't make me marry them unless I was that way minded. I can't abide such doings," the old woman again went on after a pause. "I knows what I knows, and I sees what I sees."

"What do you know?" said Mary, driven beyond her powers of silence.

"The meaning is, that Mr Whittlestaff is to be disappointed after he have received a promise. Didn't he have a promise?" To this Mrs Baggett got no reply, though she waited for one before she went on with her argument. "You knows he had; and a promise between a lady and gentleman ought to be as good as the law of the land. You stand there as dumb as grim death, and won't say a word, and yet it all depends upon you. Why is it to go about among everybody, that he's not to get a wife just because a man's come home with his pockets full of diamonds? It's that that people'll say; and they'll say that you went back from your word just because of a few precious stones. I wouldn't like to have it said of me anyhow."

This was very hard to bear, but Mary found herself compelled to bear it. She had determined not to be led into an argument with Mrs Baggett on the subject, feeling that even to discuss her conduct would be an impropriety.

She was strong in her own conduct, and knew how utterly at variance it had been with all that this woman imputed to her. The glitter of the diamonds had been merely thrown in by Mrs Baggett in her passion. Mary did not think that any one would be so base as to believe such an accusation as that. It would be said of her that her own young lover had come back suddenly, and that she had preferred him to the gentleman to whom she was tied by so many bonds. It would be said that she had given herself to him and had then taken back the gift, because the young lover had come across her path. And it would be told also that there had been no word of promise given to this young lover. All that would be very bad, without any allusion to a wealth of diamonds. It would not be said that, before she had pledged herself to Mr Whittlestaff, she had pleaded her affection for her young lover, when she had known nothing even of his present existence. It would not be known that though

there had been no lover's vows between her and John Gordon, there had yet been on both sides that unspoken love which could not have been strengthened by any vows. Against all that she must guard herself, without thinking of the diamonds. She had endeavoured to guard herself, and she had thought also of the contentment of the man who had been so good to her. She had declared to herself that of herself she would think not at all. And she had determined also that all the likings,—nay, the affection of John Gordon himself,—should weigh not at all with her. She had to decide between the two men, and she had decided that both honesty and gratitude required her to comply with the wishes of the elder. She had done all that she could with that object, and was it her fault that Mr Whittlestaff had read the secret of her heart, and had determined to give way before it? This had so touched her that it might almost be said that she knew not to which of her two suitors her heart be-

longed. All this, if stated in answer to Mrs Baggett's accusations, would certainly exonerate herself from the stigma thrown upon her, but to Mrs Baggett she could not repeat the explanation.

"It nigh drives me wild," said Mrs Baggett. "I don't suppose you ever heard of Catherine Bailey?"

"Never."

"And I ain't a-going to tell you. It's a romance as shall be wrapped inside my own bosom. It was quite a tragedy,—was Catherine Bailey; and one as would stir your heart up if you was to hear it. Catherine Bailey was a young woman. But I'm not going to tell you the story;—only that she was no more fit for Mr Whittlestaff than any of them stupid young girls that walks about the streets gaping in at the shop-windows in Alresford. I do you the justice, Miss Lawrie, to say as you are such a female as he ought to look after."

"Thank you, Mrs Baggett."

“But she led him into such trouble, because his heart is soft, as was dreadful to look at. He is one of them as always wants a wife. Why didn't he get one before? you'll say. Because till you came in the way he was always thinking of Catherine Bailey. Mrs Compas she become. ‘Drat her and her babies!’ I often said to myself. What was Compas? No more than an Old Bailey lawyer;—not fit to be looked at alongside of our Mr Whittlestaff. No more ain't Mr John Gordon, to my thinking. You think of all that, Miss Mary, and make up your mind whether you'll break his heart after giving a promise. Heart-breaking ain't to him what it is to John Gordon and the likes of him.”

CHAPTER XX.

MR WHITTLESTAFF TAKES HIS JOURNEY.

MR WHITTLESTAFF did at last get into the train and have himself carried up to London. And he ate his sandwiches and drank his sherry with an air of supreme satisfaction,—as though he had carried his point. And so he had. He had made up his mind on a certain matter; and, with the object of doing a certain piece of work, he had escaped from the two dominant women of his household, who had done their best to intercept him. So far his triumph was complete. But as he sat silent in the corner of the carriage, his mind reverted to the purpose of his journey, and he cannot be said to have been triumphant. He knew it all as well

as did Mrs Baggett. And he knew too that, except Mrs Baggett and the girl herself, all the world was against him. That ass Montagu Blake every time he opened his mouth as to his own bride let out the idea that John Gordon should have his bride because John Gordon was young and lusty, and because he, Whittlestaff, might be regarded as an old man. The Miss Halls were altogether of the same opinion, and were not slow to express it. All Alresford would know it, and would sympathise with John Gordon. And as it came to be known that he himself had given up the girl whom he loved, he could read the ridicule which would be conveyed by the smiles of his neighbours.

To tell the truth of Mr Whittlestaff, he was a man very open to such shafts of ridicule. The "*robur et æs triplex*" which fortified his heart went only to the doing of a good and unselfish action, and did not extend to providing him with that adamantine shield which virtue should of itself supply. He was as pervious

to these stings as a man might be who had not strength to act in opposition to them. He could screw himself up to the doing of a great deed for the benefit of another, and could as he was doing so deplore with inward tears the punishment which the world would accord to him for the deed. As he sat there in the corner of his carriage, he was thinking of the punishment rather than of the glory. And the punishment must certainly come now. It would be a punishment lasting for the remainder of his life, and so bitter in its kind as to make any further living almost impossible to him. It was not that he would kill himself. He did not meditate any such step as that. He was a man who considered that by doing an outrage to God's work an offence would be committed against God which admitted of no repentance. He must live through it to the last. But he must live as a man who was degraded. He had made his effort, but his effort would be known to all Alres-

ford. Mr Montagu Blake would take care of that.

The evil done to him would be one which would admit of no complaint from his own mouth. He would be left alone, living with Mrs Baggett,—who of course knew all the facts. The idea of Mrs Baggett going away with her husband was of course not to be thought of. That was another nuisance, a small evil in comparison with the great misfortune of his life.

He had brought this girl home to his house to be the companion of his days, and she had come to have in his mouth a flavour, as it were, and sweetness beyond all other sweetnesses. She had lent a grace to his days of which for many years he had not believed them to be capable. He was a man who had thought much of love, reading about it in all the poets with whose lines he was conversant. He was one who, in all that he read, would take the gist of it home to himself, and ask himself how



it was with him in that matter. His favourite Horace had had a fresh love for every day; but he had told himself that Horace knew nothing of love. Of Petrarch and Laura he had thought; but even to Petrarch Laura had been a subject for expression rather than for passion. Prince Arthur, in his love for Guinevere, went nearer to the mark which he had fancied for himself. Imogen, in her love for Posthumus, gave to him a picture of all that love should be. It was thus that he had thought of himself in all his readings; and as years had gone by, he had told himself that for him there was to be nothing better than reading. But yet his mind had been full, and he had still thought to himself that, in spite of his mistake in reference to Catherine Bailey, there was still room for a strong passion.

Then Mary Lawrie had come upon him, and the sun seemed to shine nowhere but in her eyes and in the expression of her face. He had told himself distinctly that he was now

in love, and that his life had not gone so far forward as to leave him stranded on the dry sandhills. She was there living in his house, subject to his orders, affectionate and docile; but, as far as he could judge, a perfect woman. And, as far as he could judge, there was no other man whom she loved. Then, with many doubtings, he asked her the question, and he soon learned the truth,—but not the whole truth.

There had been a man, but he was one who seemed to have passed by and left his mark, and then to have gone on altogether out of sight. She had told him that she could not but think of John Gordon, but that that was all. She would, if he asked it, plight her troth to him and become his wife, although she must think of John Gordon. This thinking would last but for a while, he told himself; and he at his age—what right had he to expect aught better than that? She was of such a nature that, when she had given herself up in mar-

riage, she would surely learn to love her husband. So he had accepted her promise, and allowed himself for one hour to be a happy man.

Then John Gordon had come to his house, falling upon it like the blast of a storm. He had come at once—instantly—as though fate had intended to punish him, Whittlestaff, utterly and instantly. Mary had told him that she could not promise not to think of him who had once loved her, when, lo and behold! the man himself was there. Who ever suffered a blow so severe as this? He had left them together. He had felt himself compelled to do so by the exigencies of the moment. It was impossible that he should give either one or the other to understand that they would not be allowed to meet in his house. They had met, and Mary had been very firm. For a few hours there had existed in his bosom the feeling that even yet he might be preferred.

But gradually that feeling had disappeared, and the truth had come home to him. She was as much in love with John Gordon as could any girl be with the man whom she adored. And the other rock on which he had depended was gradually shivered beneath his feet. He had fancied at first that the man had come back, as do so many adventurers, without the means of making a woman happy. It was not for John Gordon that he was solicitous, but for Mary Lawrie. If John Gordon were a pauper, or so nearly so as to be able to offer Mary no home, then it would clearly be his duty not to allow the marriage. In such case the result to him would be, if not heavenly, sweet enough at any rate to satisfy his longings. She would come to him, and John Gordon would depart to London, and to the world beyond, and there would be an end of him. But it became palpable to his senses generally that the man's fortunes had not been such as this. And then there came home to

him a feeling that were they so, it would be his duty to make up for Mary's sake what was wanting,—since he had discovered of what calibre was the man himself.

It was at Mr Hall's house that the idea had first presented itself to him with all the firmness of a settled project. It would be, he had said to himself, a great thing for a man to do. What, after all, is the meaning of love, but that a man should do his best to serve the woman he loves? "Who cares a straw for him?" he said to himself, as though to exempt himself from any idea of general charity, and to prove that all the good which he intended to do was to be done for love alone. "Not a straw; whether he shall stay at home here and have all that is sweetest in the world, or be sent out alone to find fresh diamonds amidst the dirt and misery of that horrid place, is as nothing, as far as he is concerned. I am, at any rate, more to myself than John Gordon. I do not believe in doing a kindness of

such a nature as that to such a one. But for her——! And I could not hold her to my bosom, knowing that she would so much rather be in the arms of another man.” All this he said to himself; but he said it in words fully formed, and with the thoughts, on which the words were based, clearly established.

When he came to the end of his journey, he had himself driven to the hotel, and ordered his dinner, and ate it in solitude, still supported by the ecstasy of his thoughts. He knew that there was before him a sharp cruel punishment, and then a weary lonely life. There could be no happiness, no satisfaction, in store for him. He was aware that it must be so; but still for the present there was a joy to him in thinking that he would make her happy, and in that he was determined to take what immediate delight it would give him. He asked himself how long that delight could last; and he told himself that when John Gordon should have once taken her by the hand and

claimed her as his own, the time of his misery would have come.

There had hung about him a dream, clinging to him up to the moment of his hotel dinner, by which he had thought it possible that he might yet escape from the misery of Pandemonium and be carried into the light and joy of Paradise. But as he sat with his beef-steak before him, and ate his accustomed potato, with apparently as good a gusto as any of his neighbours, the dream departed. He told himself that under no circumstances should the dream be allowed to become a reality. The dream had been of this wise. With all the best intentions in his power he would offer the girl to John Gordon, and then, not doubting Gordon's acceptance of her, would make the same offer to the girl herself. But what if the girl refused to accept the offer? What if the girl should stubbornly adhere to her original promise? Was he to refuse to marry her when she should insist that such was her right? Was he

to decline to enter in upon the joys of Paradise when Paradise should be thus opened to him ? He would do his best, loyally and sincerely, with his whole heart. But he could not force her to make him a wretch, miserable for the rest of his life !

In fact it was she who might choose to make the sacrifice, and thus save him from the unhappiness in store for him. Such had been the nature of his dream. As he was eating his beef-steak and potatoes, he told himself that it could not be so, and that the dream must be flung to the winds. A certain amount of strength was now demanded of him, and he thought that he would be able to use it. “No, my dear, not me ; it may not be that you should become my wife, though all the promises under heaven had been given. Though you say that you wish it, it is a lie which may not be ratified. Though you implore it of me, it cannot be granted. It is he that is your love, and it is he that must have you. I love you

too, God in his wisdom knows, but it cannot be so. Go and be his wife, for mine you shall never become. I have meant well, but have been unfortunate. Now you know the state of my mind, than which nothing is more fixed on this earth." It was thus that he would speak to her, and then he would turn away; and the term of his misery would have commenced.

On the next morning he got up and prepared for his interview with John Gordon. He walked up and down the sward of the Green Park, thinking to himself of the language which he would use. If he could only tell the man that he hated him while he surrendered to him the girl whom he loved so dearly, it would be well. For in truth there was nothing of Christian charity in his heart towards John Gordon. But he thought at last that it would be better that he should announce his purpose in the simplest language. He could hate the man in his own heart as thoroughly as he desired. But it would not be

becoming in him, were he on such an occasion to attempt to rise to the romance of tragedy. "It will be all the same a thousand years hence," he said to himself as he walked in at the club door.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE GREEN PARK.

HE asked whether Mr John Gordon was within, and in two minutes found himself standing in the hall with that hero of romance. Mr Whittlestaff told himself, as he looked at the man, that he was such a hero as ought to be happy in his love. Whereas of himself, he was conscious of a personal appearance which no girl could be expected to adore. He thought too much of his personal appearance generally, complaining to himself that it was mean; whereas in regard to Mary Lawrie, it may be said that no such idea had ever entered her mind. "It was just because he had come first," she would have said if asked. And the

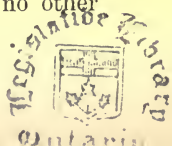
“he” alluded to would have been John Gordon. “He had come first, and therefore I had learned to love him.” It was thus that Mary Lawrie would have spoken. But Mr Whittlestaff, as he looked up into John Gordon’s face, felt that he himself was mean.

“You got my letter, Mr Gordon?”

“Yes; I got it last night.”

“I have come up to London, because there is something that I want to say to you. It is something that I can’t very well put up into a letter, and therefore I have taken the trouble to come to town.” As he said this he endeavoured, no doubt, to assert his own dignity by the look which he assumed. Nor did he intend that Mr Gordon should know anything of the struggle which he had endured.

But Mr Gordon knew as well what Mr Whittlestaff had to say as did Mr Whittlestaff himself. He had turned the matter over in his own mind since the letter had reached him, and was aware that there could be no other



cause for seeing him which could bring Mr Whittlestaff up to London. But a few days since he had made an appeal to Mr Whittlestaff—an appeal which certainly might require much thought for its answer—and here was Mr Whittlestaff with his reply. It could not have been made quicker. It was thus that John Gordon had thought of it as he had turned Mr Whittlestaff's letter over in his mind. The appeal had been made readily enough. The making of it had been easy; the words to be spoken had come quickly, and without the necessity for a moment's premeditation. He had known it all, and from a full heart the mouth speaks. But was it to have been expected that a man so placed as had been Mr Whittlestaff, should be able to give his reply with equal celerity? He, John Gordon, had seen at once on reaching Croker's Hall the state in which things were. Almost hopelessly he had made his appeal to the man who had her promise. Then he had met the man at Mr

Hall's house, and hardly a word had passed between them. What word could have been expected? Montagu Blake, with all his folly, had judged rightly in bringing them together. When he received the letter, John Gordon had remembered that last word which Mr Whittlestaff had spoken to him in the squire's hall. He had thought of the appeal, and had resolved to give an answer to it. It was an appeal which required an answer. He had turned it over in his mind, and had at last told himself what the answer should be. John Gordon had discovered all that when he received the letter, and it need hardly be said that his feelings in regard to Mr Whittlestaff were very much kinder than those of Mr Whittlestaff to him.

"Perhaps you wouldn't mind coming out into the street," said Mr Whittlestaff. "I can't say very well what I've got to say in here."

"Certainly," said Gordon; "I will go anywhere."

“Let us go into the Park. It is green there, and there is some shade among the trees.” Then they went out of the club into Pall Mall, and Mr Whittlestaff walked on ahead without a word. “No; we will not go down there,” he said, as he passed the entrance into St James’s Park by Marlborough House, and led the way through St James’s Palace into the Green Park. “We’ll go on till we come to the trees; there are seats there, unless the people have occupied them all. One can’t talk here under the blazing sun;—at least I can’t.” Then he walked on at a rapid pace, wiping his brow as he did so. “Yes, there’s a seat. I’ll be hanged if that man isn’t going to sit down upon it! What a beast he is! No, I can’t sit down on a seat that another man is occupying. I don’t want any one to hear what I’ve got to say. There! Two women have gone a little farther on.” Then he hurried to the vacant bench and took possession of it. It was placed among the thick trees which give a perfect shade on the

north side of the Park, and had Mr Whittlestaff searched all London through, he could not have found a more pleasant spot in which to make his communication. "This will do," said he.

"Very nicely indeed," said John Gordon.

"I couldn't talk about absolutely private business in the hall of the club, you know."

"I could have taken you into a private room, Mr Whittlestaff, had you wished it."

"With everybody coming in and out, just as they pleased. I don't believe in private rooms in London clubs. What I've got to say can be said better *sub dio*. I suppose you know what it is that I've got to talk about."

"Hardly," said John Gordon. "But that is not exactly true. I think I know, but I am not quite sure of it. On such a subject I should not like to make a surmise unless I were confident."

"It's about Miss Lawrie."

"I suppose so."

"What makes you suppose that?" said Whittlestaff, sharply.

"You told me that you were sure I should know."

"So I am, quite sure. You came all the way down to Alresford to see her. If you spoke the truth, you came all the way home from the diamond-fields with the same object."

"I certainly spoke the truth, Mr Whittlestaff."

"Then what's the good of your pretending not to know?"

"I have not pretended. I merely said that I could not presume to put the young lady's name into your mouth until you had uttered it yourself. There could be no other subject of conversation between you and me of which I was aware."

"You had spoken to me about her," said Mr Whittlestaff.

"No doubt I had. When I found that you had given her a home, and had made yourself, as it were, a father to her——"

"I had not made myself her father, — nor yet her mother. I had loved her, as you profess to do."

"My profession is at any rate true."

"I daresay. You may or you mayn't; I at any rate know nothing about it."

"Why otherwise should I have come home and left my business in South Africa? I think you may take it for granted that I love her."

"I don't care twopence whether you do or don't," said Mr Whittlestaff. "It's nothing to me whom you love. I should have been inclined to say at first sight that a man groping in the dirt for diamonds wouldn't love any one. And even if you did, though you might break your heart and die, it would be nothing to me. Had you done so, I should not have heard of you, nor should I have wished to hear of you."

There was an incivility in all this of which John Gordon felt that he was obliged to take some notice. There was a want of courtesy in

the man's manner rather than his words, which he could not quite pass by, although he was most anxious to do so. "I daresay not," said he; "but here I am and here also is Miss Lawrie. I had said what I had to say down at Alresford, and of course it is for you now to decide what is to be done. I have never supposed that you would care personally for me."

"You needn't be so conceited about yourself."

"I don't know that I am," said Gordon;—"except that a man cannot but be a little conceited who has won the love of Mary Lawrie."

"You think it impossible that I should have done so."

"At any rate I did it before you had seen her. Though I may be conceited, I am not more conceited for myself than you are for yourself. Had I not known her, you would probably have engaged her affections. I had known her, and you are aware of the result. But it is for you to decide. Miss Lawrie thinks

that she owes you a debt which she is bound to pay if you exact it."

"Exact it!" exclaimed Mr Whittlestaff.
"There is no question of exacting!" John Gordon shrugged his shoulders. "I say there is no question of exacting. The words should not have been used. She has my full permission to choose as she may think fit, and she knows that she has it. What right have you to speak to me of exacting?"

Mr Whittlestaff had now talked himself into such a passion, and was apparently so angry at the word which his companion had used, that John Gordon began to doubt whether he did in truth know the purpose for which the man had come to London. Could it be that he had made the journey merely with the object of asserting that he had the power of making this girl his wife, and of proving his power by marrying her. "What is that you wish, Mr Whittlestaff?" he asked.

"Wish! What business have you to ask

after my wishes? But you know what my wishes are very well. I will not pretend to keep them in the dark. She came to my house, and I soon learned to desire that she should be my wife. If I know what love is, I loved her. If I know what love is, I do love her still. She is all the world to me. I have no diamonds to care for; I have no rich mines to occupy my heart; I am not eager in the pursuit of wealth. I had lived a melancholy, lonely life till this young woman had come to my table,—till I had felt her sweet hand upon mine,—till she had hovered around me, covering everything with bright sunshine. Then I asked her to be my wife;—and she told me of you.”

“She told you of me?”

“Yes; she told me of you—of you who might then have been dead, for aught she knew. And when I pressed her, she said that she would think of you always.”

“She said so?”

“Yes; that she would think of you always. But she did not say that she would always love you. And in the same breath she promised to be my wife. I was contented,—and yet not quite contented. Why should she think of you always? But I believed that it would not be so. I thought that if I were good to her, I should overcome her. I knew that I should be better to her than you would be.”

“Why should I not be good to her?”

“There is an old saying of a young man’s slave and an old man’s darling. She would at any rate have been my darling. It might be that she would have been your slave.”

“My fellow-workman in all things.”

“You think so now; but the man always becomes the master. If you grovelled in the earth for diamonds, she would have to look for them amidst the mud and slime.”

“I have never dreamed of taking her to the diamond-fields.”

"It would have been so in all other pursuits."

"She would have had none that she had not chosen," said John Gordon.

"How am I to know that? How am I to rest assured that the world would be smooth to her if she were your creature? I am not assured—I do not know."

"Who can tell, as you say? Can I promise her a succession of joys if she be my wife? She is not one who will be likely to look for such a life as that. She will know that she must take the rough and smooth together."

"There would have been no rough with me," said Mr Whittlestaff.

"I do not believe in such a life," said John Gordon. "A woman should not wear a stuff gown always; but the silk finery and the stuff gown should follow each other. To my taste, the more there may be of the stuff gown and the less of the finery, the more it will be to my wishes."

"I am not speaking of her gowns. It is not of such things as those that I am thinking."

Here Mr Whittlestaff got up from the bench, and began walking rapidly backwards and forwards under the imperfect shade on the path.

"You will beat her."

"I think not."

"Beat her in the spirit. You will domineer over her, and desire to have your own way. When she is toiling for you, you will frown at her. Because you have business on hand, or perhaps pleasure, you will leave her in solitude. There may a time come when the diamonds shall have all gone."

"If she is to be mine, that time will have come already. The diamonds will be sold. Did you ever see a diamond in my possession? Why do you twit me with diamonds? If I had been a coal-owner, should I have been expected to keep my coals?"

"These things stick to the very soul of a man. They are a poison of which he cannot

rid himself. They are like gambling. They make everything cheap that should be dear, and everything dear that should be cheap. I trust them not at all,—and I do not trust you, because you deal in them.”

“I tell you that I shall not deal in them. But, Mr Whittlestaff, I must tell you that you are unreasonable.”

“No doubt. I am a poor miserable man who does not know the world. I have never been to the diamond - fields. Of course I understand nothing of the charms of speculation. A quiet life with my book is all that I care for;—with just one other thing, one other thing. You begrudge me that.”

“Mr Whittlestaff, it does not signify a straw what I begrudge you.” Mr Whittlestaff had now come close to him, and was listening to him. “Nor, as I take it, what you begrudge me. Before I left England she and I had learned to love each other. It is so still. For the sake of her happiness, do you mean to let me have her?”

"I do."

"You do?"

"Of course I do. You have known it all along. Of course I do. Do you think I would make her miserable? Would it be in my bosom to make her come and live with a stupid, silly old man, to potter on from day to day without any excitement? Would I force her into a groove in which her days would be wretched to her? Had she come to me and wanted bread, and have seen before her all the misery of poverty, the stone-coldness of a governess's life; had she been left to earn her bread without any one to love her, it might then have been different. She would have looked out into another world, and have seen another prospect. A comfortable home with kindness, and her needs supplied, would have sufficed. She would then have thought herself happy in becoming my wife. There would then have been no cruelty. But she had seen you, and though it was but a dream, she

thought that she could endure to wait. Better that than surrender all the delight of loving. So she told me that she would think of you. Poor dear ! I can understand now the struggle which she intended to make. Then in the very nick of time, in the absolute moment of the day—so that you might have everything and I nothing—you came. You came, and were allowed to see her, and told her all your story. You filled her heart full with joy, but only to be crushed when she thought that the fatal promise had been given to me. I saw it all, I knew it. I thought to myself for a few hours that it might be so. But it cannot be so.”

“ Oh, Mr Whittlestaff ! ”

“ It cannot be so,” he said, with a firm determined voice, as though asserting a fact which admitted no doubt.

“ Mr Whittlestaff, what am I to say to you ? ”

“ You ! What are you to say ? Nothing. What should you say ? Why should you speak ? It is not for love of you that I would

do this thing; nor yet altogether from love of her. Not that I would not do much for her sake. I almost think that I would do it entirely for her sake, if there were no other reason. But to shame myself by taking that which belongs to another, as though it were my own property! To live a coward in mine own esteem! Though I may be the laughing-stock and the butt of all those around me, I would still be a man to myself. I ought to have felt that it was sufficient when she told me that some of her thoughts must still be given to you. She is yours, Mr Gordon; but I doubt much whether you care for the possession."

"Not care for her! Up to the moment when I received your note, I was about to start again for South Africa. South Africa is no place for her,—nor for me either, with such a wife. Mr Whittlestaff, will you not allow me to say one word to you in friendship?"

"Not a word."



“How am I to come and take her out of your house?”

“She must manage it as best she can. But no; I would not turn her from my door for all the world could do for me. This, too, will be part of the punishment that I must bear. You can settle the day between you, I suppose, and then you can come down; and, after the accustomed fashion, you can meet her at the church-door. Then you can come to my house, and eat your breakfast there if you will. You will see fine things prepared for you,—such as a woman wants on those occasions,—and then you can carry her off wherever you please. I need know nothing of your whereabouts. Good morning now. Do not say anything further, but let me go my way.”

CHAPTER XXII.

JOHN GORDON WRITES A LETTER.

WHEN they parted in the park, Mr Whittlestaff trudged off to his own hotel, through the heat and sunshine. He walked quickly, and never looked behind him, and went as though he had fully accomplished his object in one direction, and must hurry to get it done in another. To Gordon he had left no directions whatever. Was he to be allowed to go down to Mary, or even to write her a letter? He did not know whether Mary had ever been told of this wonderful sacrifice which had been made on her behalf. He understood that he was to have his own way, and was to be permitted to regard himself as betrothed to her,

but he did not at all understand what steps he was to take in the matter, except that he was not to go again to the diamond-fields. But Mr Whittlestaff hurried himself off to his hotel, and shut himself up in his own bedroom,—and when there, he sobbed, alas! like a child.

The wife whom he had won for himself was probably more valuable to him than if he had simply found her disengaged and ready to jump into his arms. She, at any rate, had behaved well. Mr Whittlestaff had no doubt proved himself to be an angel, perfect all round,—such a man as you shall not meet perhaps once in your life. But Mary, too, had so behaved as to enhance the love of any man who had been already engaged to her. As he thought of the whole story of the past week, the first idea that occurred to him was that he certainly had been present to her mind during the whole period of his absence. Though not a word had passed between them, and though no word of absolute love

for each other had even been spoken before, she had been steady to him, with no actual basis on which to found her love. He had known, and she had been sure, and therefore she had been true to him. Of course, being a true man himself, he worshipped her all the more. Mr Whittlestaff was absolutely, undoubtedly perfect; but in Gordon's estimation Mary was not far off perfection. But what was he to do now, so that he might approach her?

He had pledged himself to one thing, and he must at once go to work and busy himself in accomplishing it. He had promised not to return to Africa; and he must at once see Mr Tookey, and learn whether that gentleman's friends would be allowed to go on with the purchase as arranged. He knew Poker & Hodge to be moneyed men, or to be men, at any rate, in command of money. If they would not pay him at once, he must look elsewhere for buyers; but the matter must be settled. Tookey had promised to come to his

club this day, and there he would go and await his coming.

He went to his club, but the first person who came to him was Mr Whittlestaff. Mr Whittlestaff when he had left the park had determined never to see John Gordon again, or to see him only during that ceremony of the marriage, which it might be that he would even yet escape. All that was still in the distant future. Dim ideas as to some means of avoiding it flitted through his brain. But even though he might see Gordon on that terrible occasion, he need not speak to him. And it would have to be done then, and then only. But now another idea, certainly very vague, had found its way into his mind, and with the object of carrying it out, Mr Whittlestaff had come to the club. "Oh, Mr Whittlestaff, how do you do again?"

"I'm much the same as I was before, thank you. There hasn't happened anything to improve my health."

"I hope nothing may happen to injure it."

"It doesn't much matter. You said something about some property you've got in diamonds, and you said once that you must go out to look after it."

"But I'm not going now. I shall sell my share in the mines. I am going to see a Mr Tookey about it immediately."

"Can't you sell them to me?"

"The diamond shares,—to you!"

"Why not to me? If the thing has to be done at once, of course you and I must trust each other. I suppose you can trust me?"

"Certainly I can."

"As I don't care much about it, whether I get what I buy or not, it does not much matter for me. But in truth, in such an affair as this I would trust you. Why should not I go in your place?"

"I don't think you are the man who ought to go there."

"I am too old? I'm not a cripple, if you mean that. I don't see why I shouldn't go

to the diamond-fields as well as a younger man."

"It is not about your age, Mr Whittlestaff; but I do not think you would be happy there."

"Happy! I do not know that my state of bliss here is very great. If I had bought your shares, as you call them, and paid money for them, I don't see why my happiness need stand in the way."

"You are a gentleman, Mr Whittlestaff."

"Well; I hope so."

"And of that kind that you would have your eyes picked out of your head before you had been there a week. Don't go. Take my word for it, that life will be pleasanter to you here than there, and that for you the venture would be altogether dangerous. Here is Mr Tookey." At this point of the conversation, Mr Tookey entered the hall-door, and some fashion of introduction took place between the two strangers. John Gordon led the way

into a private room, and the two others followed him. "Here's a gentleman anxious to buy my shares, Tookey," said Gordon.

"What! the whole lot of the old Stick-in-the-Mud? He'll have to shell down some money in order to do that! If I were to be asked my opinion, I should say that the transaction was hardly one in the gentleman's way of business."

"I suppose an honest man may work at it," said Mr Whittlestaff.

"It's the honestest business I know out," said Fitzwalker Tookey; "but it does require a gentleman to have his eyes about him."

"Haven't I got my eyes?"

"Oh certainly, certainly," said Tookey; "I never knew a gentleman have them brighter. But there are eyes and eyes. Here's Mr Gordon did have a stroke of luck out there;—quite wonderful! But because he tumbled on to a good thing, it's no reason that others should. And he's sold his claim already, if

he doesn't go himself,—either to me, or else to Poker & Hodge.”

“I'm afraid it is so,” said John Gordon.

“There's my darling wife, who is going out with me, and who means to stand all the hardship of the hard work amidst those scenes of constant labour,—a lady who is dying to see her babies there. I am sure, sir, that Mr Gordon won't forget his promises to me and my wife.”

“If you have the money ready.”

“There is Mr Poker in a hansom cab outside, and ready to go with you to the bank at once, as the matter is rather pressing. If you will come with him, he will explain everything. I will follow in another cab, and then everything can be completed.” John Gordon did make an appointment to meet Mr Poker in the city later on in the day, and then was left together with Mr Whittlestaff at the club.

It was soon decided that Mr Whittlestaff

should give up all idea of the diamond-fields, and in so doing he allowed himself to be brought back to a state of semi-courteous conversation with his happy rival. "Well, yes; you may write to her, I suppose. Indeed I don't know what right I have to say that you may, or you mayn't. She's more yours than mine, I suppose." "Turn her out! I don't know what makes you take such an idea as that in your head." John Gordon had not suggested that Mr Whittlestaff would turn Mary Lawrie out,—though he had spoken of the steps he would have to take were he to find Mary left without a home. "She shall have my house as her own till she can find another. As she will not be my wife, she shall be my daughter,—till she is somebody else's wife." "I told you before that you may come and marry her. Indeed I can't help myself. Of course you may go on as you would with some other girl;—only I wish it were some other girl. You can go and stay

with Montagu Blake, if you please. "It is nothing to me. Everybody knows it now." Then he did say good-bye, though he could not be persuaded to shake hands with John Gordon.

Mr Whittlestaff did not go home that day, but on the next, remaining in town till he was driven out of it by twenty-four hours of absolute misery. He had said to himself that he would remain till he could think of some future plan of life that should have in it some better promise of success for him than his sudden scheme of going to the diamond-fields. But there was no other plan which became practicable in his eyes. On the afternoon of the very next day London was no longer bearable to him; and as there was no other place but Croker's Hall to which he could take himself with any prospect of meeting friends who would know anything of his ways of life, he did go down on the following day. One consequence of this was, that Mary

had received from her lover the letter which he had written almost as soon as he had received Mr Whittlestaff's permission to write. The letter was as follows:—

“DEAR MARY,—I do not know whether you are surprised by what Mr Whittlestaff has done; but I am,—so much so that I hardly know how to write to you on the matter. If you will think of it, I have never written to you, and have never been in a position in which writing seemed to be possible. Nor do I know as yet whether you are aware of the business which has brought Mr Whittlestaff to town.

“I suppose I am to take it for granted that all that he tells me is true; though when I think what it is that I have to accept,—and that on the word of a man who is not your father, and who is a perfect stranger to me,—it does seem as though I were assuming a great deal. And yet it is no more than I

asked him to do for me when I saw him at his own house.

“I had no time then to ask for your permission; nor, had I asked for it, would you have granted it to me. You had pledged yourself, and would not have broken your pledge. If I asked for your hand at all, it was from him that I had to ask. How will it be with me if you shall refuse to come to me at his bidding?

“I have never told you that I loved you, nor have you expressed your willingness to receive my love. Dear Mary, how shall it be? No doubt I do count upon you in my very heart as being my own. After this week of troubles it seems as though I can look back upon a former time in which you and I had talked to one another as though we had been lovers. May I not think that it was so? May it not be so? May I not call you my Mary?

“And indeed between man and man, as I

would say, only that you are not a man, have I not a right to assume that it is so? I told him that it was so down at Croker's Hall, and he did not contradict me. And now he has been the most indiscreet of men, and has allowed all your secrets to escape from his breast. He has told me that you love me, and has bade me do as seems good to me in speaking to you of my love.

"But, Mary, why should there be any mock modesty or pretence between us? When a man and woman mean to become husband and wife, they should at any rate be earnest in their profession. I am sure of my love for you, and of my earnest longing to make you my wife. Tell me;—am I not right in counting upon you for wishing the same thing?

"What shall I say in writing to you of Mr Whittlestaff? To me personally he assumes the language of an enemy. But he contrives to do so in such a way that I can take it only

as the expression of his regret that I should be found to be standing in his way. His devotion to you is the most beautiful expression of self-abnegation that I have ever met. He tells me that nothing is done for me; but it is only that I may understand how much more is done for you. Next to me,—yes, Mary, next to myself, he should be the dearest to you of human beings. I am jealous already, almost jealous of his goodness. Would that I could look forward to a life in which I would be regarded as his friend.

“Let me have a line from you to say that it is as I would wish it, and name a day in which I may come to visit you. I shall now remain in London only to obey your behests. As to my future life, I can settle nothing till I can discuss it with you, as it will be your life also. God bless you, my own one.—Yours affectionately,

JOHN GORDON.”

“We are not to return to the diamond-fields.

I have promised Mr Whittlestaff that it shall be so."

Mary, when she received this letter, retired into her own room to read it. For indeed her life in public,—her life, that is, to which Mrs Baggett has access,—had been in some degree disturbed since the departure of the master of the house. Mrs Baggett certainly proved herself to be a most unreasonable old woman. She praised Mary Lawrie up to the sky as being the only woman fitted to be her master's wife, at the same time abusing Mary for driving her out of the house were the marriage to take place; and then abusing her also because Mr Whittlestaff had gone to town to look up another lover on Mary's behalf. "It isn't my fault; I did not send him," said Mary.

"You could make his going of no account. You needn't have the young man when he comes back. He has come here, disturbing us

all with his diamonds, in a most objectionable manner."

"You would be able to remain here and not have to go away with that dreadfully drunken old man." This Mary had said, because there had been rather a violent scene with the one-legged hero in the stable.

"What's that to do with it? Baggett ain't the worst man in the world by any means. If he was a little cross last night, he ain't so always. You'd be cross yourself, Miss, if you didn't get straw enough under you to take off the hardness of the stones."

"But you would go and live with him."

"Ain't he my husband! Why shouldn't a woman live with her husband? And what does it matter where I live, or how. You ain't going to marry John Gordon, I know, to save me from Timothy Baggett!" Then the letter had come—the letter from Mary's lover; and Mary retired to her own room to read it. The letter she thought was perfect, but not so perfect as

was Mr Whittlestaff. When she had read the letter, although she had pressed it to her bosom and kissed it a score of times, although she had declared that it was the letter of one who was from head to foot a man, still there was room for that jealousy of which John Gordon had spoken. When Mary had said to herself that he was of all human beings surely the best, it was to Mr Whittlestaff and not to John Gordon that she made allusion.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AGAIN AT CROKER'S HALL.

ABOUT three o'clock on that day Mr Whittlestaff came home. The pony-carriage had gone to meet him, but Mary remained purposely out of the way. She could not rush out to greet him, as she would have done had his absence been occasioned by any other cause. But he had no sooner taken his place in the library than he sent for her. He had been thinking about it all the way down from London, and had in some sort prepared his words. During the next half hour he did promise himself some pleasure, after that his life was to be altogether a blank to him. He would go. To that only had he made up his mind. He would tell

Mary that she should be happy. He would make Mrs Baggett understand that for the sake of his property she must remain at Croker's Hall for some period to which he would decline to name an end. And then he would go.

"Well, Mary," he said, smiling, "so I have got back safe."

"Yes; I see you have got back."

"I saw a friend of yours when I was up in London."

"I have had a letter, you know, from Mr Gordon."

"He has written, has he? Then he has been very sudden."

"He said he had your leave to write."

"That is true. He had. I thought that, perhaps, he would have taken more time to think about it."

"I suppose he knew what he had to say," said Mary. And then she blushed, as though fearing that she had appeared to have been quite sure that her lover would not have been so dull.

"I daresay."

"I didn't quite mean that I knew."

"But you did."

"Oh, Mr Whittlestaff! But I will not attempt to deceive you. If you left it to him, he would know what to say,—immediately."

"No doubt! No doubt!"

"When he had come here all the way from South Africa on purpose to see me, as he said, of course he would know. Why should there be any pretence on my part?"

"Why, indeed?"

"But I have not answered him;—not as yet."

"There need be no delay."

"I would not do it till you had come. I may have known what he would say to me, but I may be much in doubt what I should say to him."

"You may say what you like." He answered her crossly, and she heard the tone. But he was aware of it also, and felt that he was dis-

gracing himself. There was none of the half-hour of joy which he had promised himself. He had struggled so hard to give her everything, and he might, at any rate, have perfected his gift with good humour. "You know you have my full permission," he said, with a smile. But he was aware that this smile was not pleasant,—was not such a smile as would make her happy. But it did not signify. When he was gone away, utterly abolished, then she would be happy.

"I do not know that I want your permission."

"No, no; I daresay not."

"You asked me to be your wife."

"Yes; I did."

"And I accepted you. The matter was settled then."

"But you told me of him,—even at first. And you said that you would always think of him."

"Yes; I told you what I knew to be true.

But I accepted you; and I determined to love you with all my heart,—with all my heart.”

“And you knew that you would love him without any determination.”

“I think that I have myself under more control. I think that in time,—in a little time,—I would have done my duty by you perfectly.”

“As how?”

“Loving you with all my heart.”

“And now?” It was a hard question to put to her, and so unnecessary! “And now?”

“You have distrusted me somewhat. I begged you not to go to London. I begged you not to go.”

“You cannot love two men.” She looked into his face, as though imploring him to spare her. For though she did know what was coming,—though had she asked herself, she would have said that she knew,—yet she felt herself bound to disown Mr Gordon as her very own while Mr Whittlestaff thus tantalised her. “No;

you cannot love two men. You would have tried to love me and have failed. You would have tried not to love him, and have failed then also."

"Then I would not have failed. Had you remained here, and have taken me, I should certainly not have failed then."

"I have made it easy for you, my dear;—very easy. Write your letter. Make it as loving as you please. Write as I would have had you write to me, could it have been possible. O, Mary! that ought to have been my own! O, Mary! that would have made beautiful for me my future downward steps! But it is not for such a purpose that a young life such as yours should be given. Though he should be unkind to you, though money should be scarce with you, though the ordinary troubles of the world should come upon you, they will be better for you than the ease I might have prepared for you. It will be nearer to human nature. I, at any rate, shall be here if troubles come; or if I am gone, that will remain which

relieves troubles. You can go now and write your letter."

She could not speak a word as she left the room. It was not only that her throat was full of sobs, but that her heart was laden with mingled joy and sorrow, so that she could not find a word to express herself. She went to her bedroom and took out her letter-case to do as he had bidden her;—but she found that she could not write. This letter should be one so framed as to make John Gordon joyful; but it would be impossible to bring her joy so to the surface as to satisfy him even with contentment. She could only think how far it might yet be possible to sacrifice herself and him. She sat thus an hour, and then went back, and, hearing voices, descended to the drawing-room. There she found Mr Blake and Kattie Forrester and Evelina Hall. They had come to call upon Mr Whittlestaff and herself, and were full of their own news. "Oh, Miss Lawrie, what do you think?" said Mr Blake. Miss Lawrie, however,

could not think, nor could Mr Whittlestaff. "Think of whatever is the greatest joy in the world," said Mr Blake.

"Don't make yourself such a goose," said Kattie Forrester.

"Oh, but I am in earnest. The greatest joy in all the world."

"I suppose you mean you're going to be married," said Mr Whittlestaff.

"Exactly. How good you are at guessing! Kattie has named the day. This day fortnight. Oh dear, isn't it near?"

"If you think so, it shall be this day fortnight next year," said Kattie.

"Oh dear no! I didn't mean that at all. It can't be too near. And you couldn't put it off now, you know, because the Dean has been bespoke. It is a good thing to have the Dean to fasten the knot. Don't you think so, Miss Lawrie?"

"I suppose one clergyman is just the same as another," said Mary.

"So I tell him. It will all be one twenty years hence. After all, the Dean is an old frump, and papa does not care a bit about him."

"But how are you to manage with Mr New-face?" asked Mr Whittlestaff.

"That's the best part of it all. Mr Hall is such a brick, that when we come back from the Isle of Wight he is going to take us all in."

"If that's the best of it, you can be taken in without me," said Kattie.

"But it is good; is it not? We two, and her maid. She's to be promoted to nurse one of these days."

"If you're such a fool, I never will have you. It's not too late yet, remember that." All which rebukes—and there were many of them—Mr Montagu Blake received with loud demonstrations of joy. "And so, Miss Lawrie, you're to be in the same boat too," said Mr Blake. "I know all about it."

Mary blushed, and looked at Mr Whittlestaff. But he took upon himself the task of answering

the clergyman's remarks. "But how do you know anything about Miss Lawrie?"

"You think that no one can go up to London but yourself, Mr Whittlestaff. I was up there myself yesterday;—as soon as ever this great question of the day was positively settled, I had to look after my own *trousseau*. I don't see why a gentleman isn't to have a *trousseau* as well as a lady. At any rate, I wanted a new black suit, fit for the hymeneal altar. And when there I made out John Gordon, and soon wormed the truth out of him. At least he did not tell me downright, but he let the cat so far out of the bag that I soon guessed the remainder. I always knew how it would be, Miss Lawrie."

"You didn't know anything at all about it," said Mr Whittlestaff. "It would be very much more becoming if you would learn sometimes to hold your tongue."

Then Miss Evelina Hall struck in. Would Miss Lawrie come over to Little Alresford

Park, and stay there for a few days previous to the wedding? Kattie Forrester meant to bring down a sister with her as a bridesmaid. Two of the Miss Halls were to officiate also, and it would be taken as a great favour if Miss Lawrie would make a fourth. A great deal was said to press upon her this view of the case, to which, however, she made many objections. There was, indeed, a tragedy connected with her own matrimonial circumstances, which did not make her well inclined to join such a party. Her heart was not at ease within her as to her desertion of Mr Whittlestaff. Whatever the future might bring forth, the present could not be a period of joy. But in the middle of the argument, Mr Whittlestaff spoke with the voice of authority. "Accept Mr Hall's kindness," he said, "and go over for a while to Little Alresford."

"And leave you all alone?"

"I'm sure Mr Hall will be delighted if you will come too," said Mr Blake, ready at the

moment to answer for the extent of his patron's house and good-nature.

"Quite out of the question," said Mr Whittlestaff, in a tone of voice intended to put an end to that matter. "But I can manage to live alone for a few days, seeing that I shall be compelled to do so before long, by Miss Lawrie's marriage." Again Mary looked up into his face. "It is so, my dear. This young gentleman has managed to ferret out the truth, while looking for his wedding garments. Will you tell your papa, Miss Evelina, that Mary will be delighted to accept his kindness?"

"And Gordon can come down to me," said Blake, uproariously, rubbing his hands; "and we can have three or four final days together, like two jolly young bachelors."

"Speaking for yourself alone," said Kattie,—
"you'll have to remain a jolly young bachelor a considerable time still, if you don't mend your manners."

"I needn't mend my manners till after I'm

married, I suppose." But they who knew Mr Blake well were wont to declare that in the matter of what Miss Forrester called his manners, there would not be much to make his wife afraid.

The affair was settled as far as it could be settled in Mr Gordon's absence. Miss Lawrie was to go over and spend a fortnight at Little Alresford just previous to Kattie Forrester's marriage, and Gordon was to come down to the marriage, so as to be near to Mary, if he could be persuaded to do so. Of this Mr Blake spoke with great certainty. "Why shouldn't he come and spoon a bit, seeing that he never did so yet in his life? Now I have had a lot of it."

"Not such a lot by any means," said Miss Forrester.

"According to all accounts he's got to begin it. He told me that he hadn't even proposed regular. Doesn't that seem odd to you, Kattie?"

"It seemed very odd when you did it." Then

the three of them went away, and Mary was left to discuss the prospects of her future life with Mr Whittlestaff. "You had better both of you come and live here," he said. "There would be room enough." Mary thought probably of the chance there might be of newcomers, but she said nothing. "I should go away, of course," said Mr Whittlestaff.

"Turn you out of your own house!"

"Why not? I shan't stay here any way. I am tired of the place, and though I shan't care to sell it, I shall make a move. A man ought to make a move every now and again. I should like to go to Italy, and live at one of those charming little towns."

"Without a soul to speak to."

"I shan't want anybody to speak to. I shall take with me just a few books to read. I wonder whether Mrs Baggett would go with me. She can't have much more to keep her in England than I have." But this plan had not been absolutely fixed when Mary retired for

the night, with the intention of writing her letter to John Gordon before she went to bed. Her letter took her long to write. The thinking of it rather took too long. She sat leaning with her face on her hands, and with a tear occasionally on her cheek, into the late night, meditating rather on the sweet goodness of Mr Whittlestaff than on the words of the letter. It had at last been determined that John Gordon should be her husband. That the fates seem to have decided, and she did acknowledge that in doing so the fates had been altogether propitious. It would have been very difficult,—now at last she owned that truth to herself,—it would have been very difficult for her to have been true to the promise she had made, altogether to eradicate John Gordon from her heart, and to fill up the place left with a wife's true affection for Mr Whittlestaff. To the performance of such a task as that she would not be subjected. But on the other hand,

John Gordon must permit her to entertain and to evince a regard for Mr Whittlestaff, not similar at all to the regard which she would feel for her husband, but almost equal in its depth.

At last she took the paper and did write her letter, as follows :—

“DEAR MR GORDON,—I am not surprised at anything that Mr Whittlestaff should do which shows the goodness of his disposition and the tenderness of his heart. He is, I think, the most unselfish of mankind. I believe you to be so thoroughly sincere in the affection which you express for me, that you must acknowledge that he is so. If you love me well enough to make me your wife, what must you think of him who has loved me well enough to surrender me to one whom I had known before he had taken me under his fostering care ?

“You know that I love you, and am willing

to become your wife. What can I say to you now, except that it is so. It is so. And in saying that, I have told you everything as to myself. Of him I can only say, that his regard for me has been more tender even than that of a father.
—Yours always most lovingly,

“MARY LAWRIE.”

CHAPTER XXIV.

CONCLUSION.

THE day came at last on which Mary's visit to Little Alresford was to commence. Two days later John Gordon was to arrive at the Parsonage, and Mary's period of being "spooned" was to be commenced,—according to Mr Blake's phraseology. "No, my dear; I don't think I need go with you," said Mr Whittlestaff, when the very day was there.

"Why not come and call?"

"I don't much care about calling," said Mr Whittlestaff. This was exactly the state of mind to which Mary did not wish to see her friend reduced,—that of feeling it to be necessary to avoid his fellow-creatures.

"You think Mr Blake is silly. He is a silly young man, I allow; but Mr Hall has been very civil. As I am to go there for a week, you might as well take me." As she spoke she put her arm around him, caressing him.

"I don't care particularly for Mr Blake; but I don't think I'll go to Little Alresford." Mary understood, when he said this the second time, that the thing was fixed as fate. He would not go to Little Alresford. Then, in about a quarter of an hour, he began again—"I think you'll find me gone when you come back again."

"Gone! where shall you have gone?"

"I'm not quite comfortable here. Don't look so sad, you dear, dear girl." Then he crossed the room and kissed her tenderly. "I have a nervous irritable feeling which will not let me remain quiet. Of course, I shall come for your marriage, whenever that may be fixed."

"Oh, Mr Whittlestaff, do not talk in that way! That will be a year to come, or perhaps

two or three. Do not let it disturb you in that way, or I shall swear that I will not be married at all. Why should I be married if you are to be miserable ? ”

“ It has been all settled, my dear. Mr Gordon is to be the lord of all that. And though you will be supposed to have fixed the day, it is he that will really fix it ;—he, or the circumstances of his life. When a young lady has promised a young gentleman, the marriage may be delayed to suit the young gentleman’s convenience, but never to suit hers. To tell the truth, it will always be felt convenient that she shall be married as soon as may be after the promise has been given. You will see Mr Gordon in a day or two, and will find out then what are his wishes.”

“ Do you think that I shall not consult your wishes ? ”

“ Not in the least, my dear. I, at any rate, shall have no wishes,—except what may be best for your welfare. Of course I must see

him, and settle some matters that will have to be settled. There will be money matters."

"I have no money," said Mary,—“not a shilling! He knows that."

"Nevertheless there will be money matters, which you will have the goodness to leave to me. Are you not my daughter, Mary, my only child? Don't trouble yourself about such matters as these, but do as you're bid. Now it is time for you to start, and Hayonotes will be ready to go with you." Having so spoken, Mr Whittlestaff put her into the carriage, and she was driven away to Little Alresford.

It then wanted a week to the Blake-cum-Forrester marriage, and the young clergyman was beginning to mix a little serious timidity with his usual garrulous high spirits. "Upon my word, you know I'm not at all sure that they are going to do it right," he said with much emphasis to Miss Lawrie. "The marriage is to be on Tuesday. She's to go home on the Saturday. I insist upon being there on the Monday.

It would make a fellow so awfully nervous travelling on the same day. But the other girls—and you're one of them, Miss Lawrie—are to go into Winchester by train on Tuesday morning, under the charge of John Gordon. If any thing were to happen to any of you, only think, where should I be ? ”

“Where should we be ? ” said Miss Lawrie.

“It isn't your marriage, you know. But I suppose the wedding could go on even if one of you didn't come. It would be such an awful thing not to have it done when the Dean is coming.” But Mary comforted him, assuring him that the Halls were very punctual in all their comings and goings when any event was in hand.

Then John Gordon came, and, to tell the truth, Mary was subjected for the first time to the ceremony of spooning. When he walked up to the door across from the Parsonage, Mary Lawrie took care not to be in the way. She took herself to her own bedroom, and there

remained, with feverish, palpitating heart, till she was summoned by Miss Hall. "You must come down and bid him welcome, you know."

"I suppose so; but——"

"Of course you must come. It must be sooner or later. He is looking so different from what he was when he was here before. And so he ought, when one considers all things."

"He has not got another journey before him to South Africa."

"Without having got what he came for," said Miss Hall. Then when they went down, Mary was told that John Gordon had passed through the house into the shrubbery, and was invited to follow him. Mary, declaring that she would go alone, took up her hat and boldly went after him. As she passed on, across the lawn, she saw his figure disappearing among the trees. "I don't think it very civil for a young lady's young man to vanish in that way," said Miss Hall. But Mary boldly and quickly followed him, without another word.

“ Mary,” he said, turning round upon her as soon as they were both out of sight among the trees. “ Mary, you have come at last.”

“ Yes ; I have come.”

“ And yet, when I first showed myself at your house, you would hardly receive me.” But this he said holding her by the hand, and looking into her face with his brightest smile. “ I had postponed my coming almost too late.”

“ Yes, indeed. Was it my fault ? ”

“ No ;—nor mine. When I was told that I was doing no good about the house, and reminded that I was penniless, what could I do but go away ? ”

“ But why go so far ? ”

“ I had to go where money could be earned. Considering all things, I think I was quick enough. Where else could I have found diamonds but at the diamond-fields ? And I have been perhaps the luckiest fellow that has gone and returned.”

“ So nearly too late ! ”

"But not too late."

"But you were too late,—only for the inexpressible goodness of another. Have you thought what I owe—what you and I owe—to Mr Whittlestaff?"

"My darling!"

"But I am his darling. Only it sounds so conceited in any girl to say so. Why should he care so much about me?—or why should you, for the matter of that?"

"Mary, Mary, come to me now." And he held out both his hands. She looked round, fearing intrusive eyes, but seeing none, she allowed him to embrace her. "My own,—at last my own. How well you understood me in these old days. And yet it was all without a word,—almost without a sign." She bowed her head before she had escaped from his arms. "Now I am a happy man."

"It is he that has done it for you."

"Am I not thankful?"

"How can I be thankful as I ought?"

Think of the gratitude that I owe him,—think of all the love! What man has loved as he has done? Who has brought himself so to abandon to another the reward he had thought it worth his while to wish for? You must not count the value of the thing.”

“But I do.”

“But the price he had set upon it! I was to be the comfort of his life to come. And it would have been so, had he not seen and had he not believed. Because another has loved, he has given up that which he has loved himself.”

“It was not for my sake.”

“But it was for mine. You had come first, and had won my poor heart. I was not worth the winning to either of you.”

“It was for me to judge of that.”

“Just so. But you do not know his heart. How prone he is to hold by that which he knows he has made his own. I was his own.”

“You told him the truth when he came to you.”



"I was his own," said Mary, firmly. "Had he bade me never to see you again, I should never have seen you. Had he not gone after you himself, you would never have come back."

"I do not know how that might be."

"It would have been to no good. Having consented to take everything from his hands, I could never have been untrue to him. I tell you that I should as certainly have become his wife, as that girl will become the wife of that young clergyman. Of course I was unhappy."

"Were you, dear?"

"Yes. I was very unhappy. When you flashed upon me there at Croker's Hall, I knew at once all the joy that had fallen within my reach. You were there, and you had come for me! All the way from Kimberley, just for me to smile upon you! Did you not?"

"Indeed I did."

"When you had found your diamonds, you thought of me,—was it not so?"

"Of you only."

“You flatterer! You dear, bonny lover. You whom I had always loved and prayed for, when I knew not where you was! You who had not left me to be like Mariana, but had hurried home at once for me when your man’s work was done,—doing just what a girl would think that a man should do for her sake. But it had been all destroyed by the necessity of the case. I take no blame to myself.”

“No; none.”

“Looking back at it all, I was right. He had chosen to want me, and had a right to me. I had taken his gifts, given with a full hand. And where were you, my own one? Had I a right to think that you were thinking of me?”

“I was thinking of you.”

“Yes; because you have turned out to be one in a hundred: but I was not to have known that. Then he asked me, and I thought it best that he should know the truth and take his choice. He did take his choice before he

knew the truth,—that you were so far on your way to seek my hand.”

“I was at that very moment almost within reach of it.”

“But still it had become his. He did not toss it from him then as a thing that was valueless. With the truest, noblest observance, he made me understand how much it might be to him, and then surrendered it without a word of ill humour, because he told himself that in truth my heart was within your keeping. If you will keep it well, you must find a place for his also.” It was thus that Mary Lawrie suffered the spooning that was inflicted upon her by John Gordon.

.

The most important part of our narrative still remains. When the day came, the Reverend Montagu Blake was duly married to Miss Catherine Forrester in Winchester Cathedral, by the Very Reverend the Dean, assisted by

the young lady's father; and it is pleasant to think that on that occasion the two clergymen behaved to each other with extreme civility. Mr Blake at once took his wife over to the Isle of Wight, and came back at the end of a month to enjoy the hospitality of Mr Hall. And with them came that lady's maid, of whose promotion to a higher sphere in life we shall expect soon to hear. Then came a period of thorough enjoyment for Mr Blake in superintending the work of Mr Newface.

"What a pity it is that the house should ever be finished!" said the bride to Augusta Hall; "because as things are now, Montagu is supremely happy: he will never be so happy again."

"Unless when the baby comes," said Augusta.

"I don't think he'll care a bit about the baby," said the bride.

The writer, however, is of a different opinion, as he is inclined to think that the Reverend

Montagu Blake will be a pattern for all fathers. One word more we must add of Mr Whittlestaff and his future life,—and one word of Mrs Baggett. Mr Whittlestaff did not leave Croker's Hall. When October had come round, he was present at Mary's marriage, and certainly did not carry himself then with any show of outward joy. He was moody and silent, and, as some said, almost uncourteous to John Gordon. But before Mary went down to the train, in preparation of her long wedding-tour, he took her up to his bedroom, and there said a final word to her. "Give him my love."

"Oh, my darling! you have made me so happy."

"You will find me better when you come back, though I shall never cease to regret all that I have lost."

Mrs Baggett accepted her destiny, and remained in supreme dominion over all women-kind at Croker's Hall. But there was private

pecuniary arrangement between her and her master, of which I could never learn the details. It resulted, however, in the sending of a money-order every Saturday morning to an old woman in whose custody the Sergeant was left.

THE END.



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